

Vietnamese Song Lyrics

Thomas D. Le

[To Vietnamese poetry](#)
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In ancient Greece, the lyre and its larger counterpart, the kithara, with five to seven strings, were played in accompaniment of the singing or reciting of epic poems. During festivities in honor of the god of wine, Dionysos, tragedies and satyr plays chosen in a competition were performed in which the chorus sang dithyrambs (choral odes) to a double-pipe reed instrument known as the aulos. Thus, poetry and music were intimately involved in communal events in Greece over two thousand years ago. Over time, with both genres developing and evolving into more complex systems of their own, they took separate paths.

Today though poems are at times set to music, song lyrics are generally not considered poetry unless the lyrics are the works of poets. Nevertheless some lyrics written by songwriters themselves express such depths of feelings and exalted passions in memorable and imaginative language that they deserve a place among poems. Such lyrics exist in the rich repertoire of modern Vietnamese songs, and need to be showcased as creative works that straddle the world of music and that of poetry.

[Ngô Thụy Miên - A Eulogy](#)

Did You Hear Autumn?

Thomas D. Le

For almost three decades I had not given enough attention to Vietnamese music of the war years for its generally languorous, melancholic and maudlin sentimentality. There was to me a certain depressing quality to period music that I would rather not endure, preferring the generally more upbeat Western classical music.

I did not realize how much I had missed of the beauty and romance that was encapsulated in so much of the music of pre-war years and of the tragic period of modern Vietnamese history.

The fall season has always captured my imagination, from my youthful days in Saigon, and more profoundly from my graduate school days in the Midwest, so much so that about a year and half ago, and rather belatedly, I decided to gather into one article a reasonable number of poems dealing with the season that I could find in French, English, American, and Vietnamese literatures. [This compendium of autumn poems](#) glorifies the beauty of nature just before the winter cold imposes its dominion at the same time it elicits melancholy among sensitive souls.

The principal reason I included Ngo Thuy Mien's song resides in the beauty of its lyrics, which to me pass all the tests of poetry. This is not to say that the music is indifferent. In fact the melody is so romantic and soul-satisfying that I kept playing it over and over, even though the instrumental arrangement of my version left something to be desired. It had totally missed bringing out the richness of the tune, and the romance, the esthetics, and the lyrical character of the words.

The reason why I had not included more Vietnamese works in my article was my own impoverished knowledge of Vietnamese literature in general, and the paucity of Vietnamese literary works in my possession in particular.

At the time of the song's inclusion, I had no idea of its author's name or its title, but it so inspired me that I thought it would have been a mistake not to present it to the reading public.

All I had to get started was the song sung by a female singer. I had to play it repeatedly in order to transcribe the words. And the words I was able to write down led me to believe that they were addressed by a woman to her lover. Throughout the work I saw the word "anh" as the recipient of the tender feelings, and lovely heart of this woman in love. I assume, given my ignorance and the meager evidence I had, that I was dealing with the voice of a young woman speaking to her man. To me it was only natural for a woman in love to spill her heart and feelings out at a highly inspiring time such as autumn.

It was pointed out to me that the original version of the song uses the pronoun "em" instead of "anh," making the speaker a man. But it was a stroke of genius about the marvelous nature of the lyrics that either interpretation was equally appropriate, equally enchanting, and equally beautiful.

I hope by saying this that I did not offend the more sensitive members of the audience about giving voice to a woman where love is involved. In a culture that constrains female amorous expression such as ours it might be anathema to even think of a woman openly declaring her love in the same way as a man is accustomed and encouraged to do. Logically, though, I see no reason why a female heart should be any more or less free to express itself than a male one is. If we are for equality, men and women both should be allowed the same cultural right of expression. Viewed in this light my "wrong" interpretation of the original version is defensible. And I hope Ngo Thuy Mien as well as others agrees with me on this score.

I love the song's lyrics for its highly poetic imagery and lyrical quality.

Whether you are a man or a woman, I want to lead you into the world that Ngo Thuy Mien has conjured up for us. Ladies, follow me, and you too, gentlemen, follow me, out of your present world.

Close your eyes and picture yourself in a wood, where the light drizzle of fall weaves its strands of tiny droplets across the landscape, where leaves are drifting every which way carried by the whims of a refreshing breeze. Can you see that in your mind's eye? With your eyes still closed, listen now to the courtship song of a deer hidden somewhere among the trees. If you have difficulty with the deer's song, substitute your own love song.

And listen to the solitude that envelops the scene. Do you sense utter serenity amid loving nature? Breathe in deeply. Do you feel a sense of peace from the fresh pure air? Do you feel the caring hand of autumnal nature surrounding you in its protective shield, as if to safeguard you from harm while you are communing with yourself, with your lover, and with nature itself?

Now let go of yourself, and free up your soul from care. Turn your attention to your own heart. Listen carefully to the stirrings of your heart, its strings vibrating to the gentle and tender touch of the breeze caressing your face, teasing your hair, and causing your lips to tremble with the intense feelings welling up from inside. Imagine now that your lover is there by your side. Keep your eyes closed still. With your lover by your side, grasp him or her in your arms, and very very gently place a tender kiss on his or her lips. Sing into his or her ear a lullaby, softly, softly... Tomorrow, my friends, the rain will lash the sheer hillsides, and you and your lover will plunge into a deep, voluptuous love in each other's embrace. Savor every minute of these enchanted moments for soon they will be just a memory, but one that will last you a lifetime.

Prolong the ecstasy a little more, and grasp the divine feelings that you and your lover share in this wondrous world. It is not a fantasy, not a phantasmagoric vision with the fleeting life of a shooting star, but a real experience. An experience that you will cherish for the rest of your life. For where else but in the world of autumn can you find such exquisite feelings, such strong yet tender emotions, and such blissful moments as only this season can bring you?

Now open your eyes. If they got misty, don't be embarrassed for, my friends, you have just experienced the magic world of love that Ngo Thuy Mien has given you, without asking for anything in return. If you look in your heart and see it filled with love, and sob because your heart begins to ache from love, tell Ngo Thuy Mien how much his creation has changed your life.

For I believe love changes your life. Read his song below, or sing the song if you know the tune, and find out for yourself what I mean.

20 February 2003

Mùa Thu Cho Em

Anh có nghe mùa thu mưa giăng lá đổ,
Anh có nghe nai vàng hát khúc yêu đương.
Và anh có nghe khi mùa thu tới,
Mang ái ân, mang tình yêu tới.
Anh có nghe, nghe hồn thu nói,
Mình yêu nhau nhé.

Anh có hay mùa thu mưa bay gió nhẹ
Anh có hay thu về hết dấu cô liêu.
Và anh có hay khi mùa thu tới,
Bao trái tim vương màu xanh mới.
Anh có hay, hay mùa thu tới,
Hồn em ngất ngây.

Nắng úa dẹt mi em và mây xanh thay tóc rối.
 Nhặt môi môi em thơm nồng.
 Tình yêu vương vương má hồng.
 Sẽ hát bài cho anh và ru anh yên giấc tối.
 Ngày mai khi mưa ngang lưng đồi.
 Cho anh anh nghe mùa thu chơi.

Anh có mơ mùa thu cho ai nức nở
 Anh có mơ mùa thu mát ướt hoen mi.
 Và anh có mơ khi mùa thu tới,
 Hai chúng ta sẽ cùng chung lối.
 Anh có mơ, mơ mùa thu ấy
 Tình ta ngát hương.

Chanson d'automne

Song of Autumn

*Entends-tu, m'amour, les pluies et les
 feuilles d'automne,
 Les chevreuils dorés chanter leurs chants
 d'amour?
 Et l'automne arrivé très doucement nous
 donne
 Des sentiments tendres et doux qui
 remplissent nos cœurs
 De passion amoureuse, nous murmure à
 l'oreille
 Des vœux d'amour mutuel sans fin ni
 pareil.*

*Sais-tu, m'amour, les pluies et les brises
 d'automne,
 Qui descendent silencieusement en
 solitude?
 Quand l'automne à pas lents et indécis
 nous donne
 Des espoirs nouveaux et dépourvus
 d'inquiétude.
 La fraîcheur automnale et la fin de l'été
 Remplissent mon âme et mon cœur de
 volupté.*

*Le soleil couchant se repose sur mes yeux,
 Les nuages bleus se sont logés dans mes
 cheveux.
 Et mes lèvres pâles pleines de chaleur
 odorante
 Rougissent ma face d'amour de couleur
 charmante.*

*Je te chanterai une berceuse douce, mon
 chéri,
 Pour te donner un sommeil bien profond et*

Did you hear, sweetheart, autumn rains and
 leaves,
 The golden deer that sing their courtship
 song,
 And autumn softly gliding in steps long
 To bring new love in which we faintly
 believe?
 The autumn spirit whisp'ring gently in my
 ear
 Eternal love we swear for you and me, my
 dear.

Did you know, sweetheart, autumn rains
 and breeze,
 The autumn easing down in solitude?
 Did you know, sweetheart, fall has come in
 peace,
 And filled our hearts with new and
 soothing mood?
 The autumn cool and sweet smells sing and
 dance,
 That set my soul afire in drunken trance.

The waning sun lit up my eyes aglow,
 As clouds in azure sky blew my teased hair.
 My pale and fragrant lips flew in the air,
 And blushed my face with love in lovely
 show.

I will sing you a soothing song, my dear,
 To lull you to a deep and peaceful sleep.
 Tomorrow rain will lash the hillside sheer,
 And you and I will bask in autumn deep.

Did you dream, sweetheart, autumn gloomy
 sobs,

<i>beau.</i>	That fill my eyes with tears and dewy
<i>Demain la pluie battra fort les flancs des</i>	drops?
<i>coteaux,</i>	Did you dream, sweetheart, autumn furtive
<i>Et nous célébrerons l'automne à notre envi.</i>	steps
	That lead our hearts to love's voluptuous
<i>Rêves-tu, mon amour, des sanglots mornes</i>	depths?
<i>d'automne,</i>	
<i>Qui font couler des larmes de mes yeux</i>	
<i>humides?</i>	
<i>Rêves-tu des pas d'automne furtivement</i>	
<i>marchant</i>	
<i>Qui remplissent nos coeurs de volupté</i>	
<i>charmante?</i>	

Ngô Thụy Miên

The Slope of Dreams

You dwell on the heights, lofty and shrouded in the haze of mist. From the vale below I look at the mysterious hilltop with a sense of deep yearning. How many times have I walked you home, scaling the gentle slope that leads to your chamber of dreams? How many times have I returned winding my way down to my abode of solitude? On your commanding heights, you hold my dreams hostage, you hold my soul captive, you dictate my pains and loneliness. And down below, I can only look up, hoping somehow we will join our dreams and bond our bodies, to the same rhythm and to the same heartbeat.

Why should love be so fragile, yet at the same time persistent, pervasive, and profound, clinging with all its might to the hopes and dreams of a lifetime? When I followed the footsteps you left behind in the sloping path, I felt your presence in every one of them. You were there, and now where are you? Still ensconced in your dreamy heights, or yonder across the thousand miles of ocean? In my wildest moments of loneliness, I dream of you, my heart given up to you.

Let me have my last dream, sweetheart. That there will be a day when we will be together again. There will be no heights to look up to, no slope to dream of, and no distance to cross, for we will be in each other's arms.

9 February 2005

Dốc Mơ

The Slope of Dreams

Đêm đã về trên dốc
 Gió xào xao ru yên tình mình
 Em có về bên đó, đôi mắt trông theo,
 trông theo tình bên
 Mà ngày tháng đâu nào có đợi chờ

The night has fallen on the slope
 With rustling wind nursing our love.
 Gone home you have taken our love
 With you, our faithful love and hope.
 Not time nor tides are going to wait.

Người yêu dấu đưa em vào dốc mơ.

Let me take you to our dream slope.

Đưa em về bên dốc mơ
Là đưa anh vào cõi mong chờ
Tóc rất buồn như lá tơ, buồn hững hờ,
tình rồi có như mơ
Em mắt cười như ánh sao
Bó môi hồng tựa bao lời nói
Nói đi em câu mong chờ
Dấu đi nổi ơ thờ, Tình ơi.

I take you to the slope of dreams
Where I linger in lonely waits,
And pine away my life, meseems,
A love fragile in dreams ornate.

Your starlike eyes glitter with smile
And rosy lips utter words fine
Of deep longing for dreams of mine
To hide our aching pain, O love.

Con dốc này, từ khi được mang dấu giày
em về
Ngày tháng nào đưa em vào ngàn trùng
sóng
Hạnh phúc nào từ khi, từ khi quen lối đưa
em về qua
Người yêu dấu đã xa thật xa, đẹp như
giấc mơ.

This slope has seen your sunken steps
Through times and tides' enormous
depths,
Has seen our bliss taking the path
Of dreams of you so far away.

Em bây giờ như lá thơ
Và anh vẫn là nỗi mong chờ
Dấu đã ngàn trùng cách xa,
bên kia trời biển rộng có bao la
Sẽ có ngày ta có nhau
Thì xin một lần cho lời cuối
Giữ cho nhau thương yêu rồi
Sẽ bên nhau muôn đời, tình ơi.

Now you are my belov'd poem
I still yearn for your love in vain
Through vast oceans of miles distant
Longing to be with you again.
Let this be my last words of hope
For that love given each other
Let it be love now forever.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
3 February 2005

Ngô Thụy Miên (1980)

Trịnh Công Sơn

Le soleil cristallin

Crystal Sunshine

Thomas D. Le

Thomas D. Le

Un matin au début du printemps comme
je m'étais absorbé dans la lecture de
l'histoire de la Troisième République
française et des dégâts qu'elle s'était
infligés à l'éruption de la Seconde Guerre
mondiale, l'air langoureux et les paroles
étourdissantes d'une chanson venant du
fond me frappèrent comme un coup de
foudre soudain. La chanson fut écrite par
le musicien vietnamien contemporain

One early spring morning as I was
engrossed in reading the story of the
French Third Republic and its self-
inflicted wounds at the outset of
World War II, the languorous melody
and stunning lyrics of a song playing
in the background suddenly struck me
like a thunderbolt. The song was
written by the well-known
contemporary Vietnamese songwriter

bien connu Trinh Cong Son. En général j'ai la tendance à éviter la musique vietnamienne des années de guerre à cause de sa tristesse et sa sentimentalité larmoyante. Cependant puisque j'ai habitude de jouer de la musique au cours du travail sédentaire dans mon étude, peut-être une dose de chansons favorites de mon poète-ami David Ly Lang Nhan serait un changement agréable à mon régime classique habituel.

Le titre de la chanson, *Le soleil cristallin*, m'intriguait. Réveillé de ma lecture confortable je la jouais plusieurs fois tout en transcrivant ses paroles. En ce faisant je me fus étonné de la juxtaposition des images incongrues et de la fusion audacieuse de sentiments, de couleurs et d'images très différente de ce que j'avais auparavant rencontré. Après bien de vains efforts pour comprendre la chanson je devins déconcerté. Pourtant sa mélodie et ses paroles me saisirent et me secouèrent de ma stupeur.

En relisant les paroles je pris lentement conscience que cette chanson se rapprochait le plus d'une peinture, celle d'un expressionniste. Je dois l'aborder à son niveau si je veux en dégager une appréciation quelconque.

L'attitude expressive et affective de l'auteur vis-à-vis la réalité objective manifeste une certaine dislocation, et les images qui en résultent me confondent, m'intriguent, me surprennent, et me libèrent. Il subordonne la réalité objective à sa fantaisie subjective dans une scission objet-sujet complète. En dehors de l'objet de son affection, que je désigne la "jeune femme", le monde extérieur, si il existe, ne l'est que pour se soumettre à son moi intérieur et ses besoins affectifs. Il les extériorise en créant son propre univers.

Voici un monde où les objets, la nature, les personnes, les mouvements, les couleurs et les sentiments s'entassent dans un panorama d'images disparates qui

Trinh Cong Son. As a general rule, I tend to eschew Vietnamese music of the war years for its sadness and maudlin sentimentality. But since I am in the habit of playing music while engaged in sedentary work in my study, perhaps a dose of one of my poet-friend David Ly Lang Nhan's favorite songs would be a welcome break from my normal classical fare.

The title of the song, *Nang Thuy Tinh* (Crystal Sunshine), is intriguing. Aroused from my comfortable reading, I played it repeatedly while transcribing its lyrics. In the process I was amazed by the juxtaposition of incongruous images and the bold fusion of feelings, colors and images unlike anything I had come across before. As I tried in vain to make sense of the song, I became dumbfounded. But its tune and lyrics grabbed me and shook me out of my stupor.

Going over the lyrics again and again, I slowly realize that this song comes closest to being a painting, an expressionist painting. I have to come to grips with it on its own terms if I am to gain any kind of appreciation.

The author's expressive and emotive attitude in relation to objective reality reveals a certain disconnect between them, and the resulting imagery confounds, befuddles, amazes, and liberates. He bends objective reality to his subjective fantasy in a complete subject-object schism. Other than the object of his affection, to whom I will refer as "the young woman," the outside world, if it exists at all, is subordinated to his inner self and its affective needs. He expresses them by creating a world of his own.

This is a world where objects, nature, people, movements, colors, and feelings crowd in together in a

présente une unité psychologique mais non structurelle. C'est le leitmotiv du soleil et des yeux de la jeune femme qui octroie à cette vision unique une marque de créativité originale.

Le caractère principal de ce drame, l'auteur de la chanson, s'impose partout, par son omniprésence. Je l'appellerai "l'homme". C'est lui qui imprègne la chanson de sa vision fantasmagorique. La musique confère le ton rêveur d'un homme qui voyage à travers le temps jusqu'à ce qu'il trouve le soleil scintillant comme un cristal dans les yeux de son amante. C'est un trajet extraordinaire, une toile de rêves, et un tapis inconscient de formes, de couleurs, de mouvements et de sons qui s'entrelacent dans une réalité qui n'existe nulle part sauf dans son monde interne.

Essayons donc, tout en suspendant notre croyance et notre jugement, de monter ce monde sur toile, en pleine conscience que l'oeuvre n'est que symbolique et non pas représentative. Cette toile est une création multidimensionnelle sur une surface à deux dimensions, sans perspective, où tous les éléments picturaux sont recrutés au service de l'expression affective.

Au début le ton est fixé par une question à laquelle la réponse ne se trouve qu'à la fin: est-ce la couleur du soleil ou celle des yeux de son bien-aimée qu'il y voit ? Ce n'est pas par accident que l'homme trouve les yeux féminins fascinants. Les musiciens, les poètes et les gens communs ont célébré les yeux des femmes au cours des siècles, et le continueront pendant des siècles à venir. Non seulement sont-ils pour l'homme un univers sentimental, ils sont aussi le commencement et la fin de la sensualité.

Comme les Fauves l'homme se sert de masses de couleurs primaires pour développer son thème. Il évoque des crachins d'automne qui fustigent les bras de la jeune femme, et peint un coucher de

panorama of disparate images that somehow has a psychological, though not structural, unity. It is the leitmotif of the sun and the young woman's eyes that confers this unique vision a mark of creative originality.

The persona of this drama, the songwriter, is felt throughout by his omnipresence. I will refer to him as "the man." He imbues the song with his phantasmagoric vision. The music sets the brooding mood of a man who travels through time until he finds the sun's sparkle in his lover's eyes like a crystal. It is an extraordinary journey, a canvas of dreams, and a tapestry of subconscious forms, colors, movements, and sounds interwoven into a reality that exists nowhere but in his inner world.

Let us, while suspending belief and judgment, try to put this world on canvas, keeping in mind that the work is not representational but symbolic. This is a multi-dimensional creation on a two-dimensional surface, totally aperspectival, where every pictorial element is pressed into service for the expression of emotions.

At the start the tone is set by a question that will not be resolved until the end of the song: Is this the color of sunshine or the color of his sweetheart's eyes? It is not an accident that the man finds her eyes fascinating. Musicians, poets, and laymen have sung of women's eyes for ages, and will continue to do so for ages more. Not only are they the center of his emotional universe, they are to him the beginning and end of sensuality.

Like the Fauves the man uses masses of primary colors to develop his theme. He evokes the autumn drizzles that slash the young woman's arms, and paints a golden sunset with its

soleil doré avec ses rayons penchant sur le porche et des nuages éthérés en haut. Imaginons les gouttelettes grises de la bruine emportées par le vent qui descendent comme des fouets minces contre les cieux teintés en or par les averses de rayons solaires obliques. Une maison, dont la présence est déduite par le porche arrosé de soleil, est enveloppée dans ce voile de lumière. Des volutes de nuages blancs s'élèvent du sol humide et chaud. Au milieu de cette scène improbable la forme amincie d'une jeune femme se suggère par le battement des pluies automnales contre ses bras. Nous ne savons rien de son apparence ou de ses habits. Mais cela peu importe.

Changeant de point de vue tout en restant conscient de l'existence de son amante, l'homme achemine la tristesse du soleil vers ses cheveux. Comment l'homme réussit-il à balayer la tristesse du soleil vers les cheveux de la frêle femme dans notre peinture ? De préférence avec un souffle de vent, comme celui du Zéphyr qui débarque Vénus sur la plage dans la *Naissance de Vénus* de Botticelli. Rappelons que le fond de la toile est doré, pas du tout adéquat pour chasser la morosité à travers le champ vers les cheveux de la jeune femme. Une partie du fond doit donc faire place à une teinte plus sombre, comme celle d'un orage imminent; et le vol de la tristesse vers sa chevelure peut être capturé par des lignes grises droites ou ondulées.

Maintenant les bras livides de l'homme s'ouvrent pour embrasser la mélancholie. Est-ce que c'est la mélancholie cosmique d'un artiste assailli d'angoisse ou adonné au mysticisme, ou simplement un état d'âme passager ? Plaçons ses bras, qui sont alanguis et bleuis à cause de l'asthénie, près de la tête de la jeune femme, et essayons de les faire envelopper la mélancholie, qui est distincte de la tristesse qu'il a chassée dans ses cheveux. Nous ne savons rien de l'expression de son visage ou son attitude

rays slanting across the porch and the ethereal clouds aloft. Picture the wind-driven drops of gray drizzles of fall coming down like slender whips against the sky bathed in gold by the sun setting in a shower of oblique rays. A house, whose presence is inferred from its sun-washed porch, is enveloped in this veil of light. Swirls of white clouds ascend from the humid warm ground. In the midst of this unlikely scene the slight figure of a young woman is hinted at by her soft arms receiving the beating of the autumn rains. We know nothing about her looks and dress. Nor does it matter.

Shifting points of view while still conscious of the existence of his love, the man sweeps the sun's sadness into her hair. How is the sadness of sunshine driven by the man into the frail woman's hair in our painting? Preferably with his breath, like Zephyr blowing Venus onto shore in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. Remember the far ground of the canvas is a bright gold, which lends itself ill to the mournful mood he wants to chase across the field to her hair. Part of this background therefore has to yield to a somber hue, such as that of an impending thunderstorm, and the flight of that *tristesse* toward her hair is captured by straight or wavy lines of gray.

Now the man's livid arms open to embrace melancholy. Is this the cosmic melancholy of an angst-ridden artist or one given to mysticism, or is it simply a passing state of soul? Place his arms, which are languid and blue with drained energy, next to the young woman's head, and try to make them wrap around the melancholy that is distinct from the sadness he has driven to her hair. We know nothing about his facial expression or attitude in this act of masochism. It is as if

dans cet acte masochiste. C'est comme si l'homme, après avoir accablé son amante de tristesse, se sent écrasé de culpabilité, et fait pénitence en infligeant sur lui-même le traitement qu'il a infligé à son bien-aimée. Donnons à cette mélancholie la couleur lugubre d'automortification sans joie.

Dans un flash-back vers un passé lointain l'homme essaie de trouver la raison pour laquelle les feuilles d'automne ne jaunissaient pas, et le soleil ne scintillait pas dans les yeux aimés. Sur notre toile, dans un coin reculé, les feuilles tombées sont vertes tandis que les froidures automnales qui remplissent l'atmosphère deviennent palpables grâce aux branches nues tremblantes. Et les yeux de la jeune femme sont dépourvus de vigueur et mornes en l'absence de reflets du soleil. Pour l'homme se pose un mystère et une énigme existentielle que les feuilles d'automne ne jaunissaient pas, et que les yeux de sa chérie ne luisaient pas comme le soleil. C'est une manifestation d'anxiété, une absurdité qui pèse lourdement sur sa conscience. D'ici commença son voyage.

Puis l'homme quitte ce coin rêveur pour le présent qui se déroule sous les pas silencieux de la jeune femme à travers le parc. Comme le vent s'élève et emporte les nuages vers la forêt, ses pas étouffés et hésitants recouvrent les arbres de soleil. Comment ces images sont-elles incorporées sur la toile ? Au moyen de trucs d'illumination qui relient le passé au présent, des volutes blanches à la Van Gogh saisissent les nuages flous dans leur vol; tandis que quelques coups de brosse créent la silhouette mouvante dans une ambiance indistincte où les couches jaunes font contraste avec les verts des arbres.

Comme la jeune femme continue à franchir le parc, ses yeux s'arrondissent d'extase car maintenant le soleil y scintille pour la première fois. Le soleil,

having burdened his beloved sweetheart with dolefulness he is overcome with guilt, and does penance by inflicting on himself the same treatment he has inflicted on her. Give this melancholy the color of dreariness, of joyless self-mortification.

Flashing back to a distant past the man tries to find a reason why autumn leaves did not yellow and the sun was not in her eyes. Back to our canvas. In a far corner fallen leaves are green when the autumn chills that fill the air are made palpable by dark shivering bare branches. And the young woman's eyes are dull and drab in the absence of indwelling sunshine. To the man it seems a mystery and a perplexing existential question that the autumn leaves of old did not yellow, and his girlfriend's eyes were not shining like the sun. It is the manifestation of anxiety, and an absurdity that weighs heavily on his consciousness. Therefrom began his journey.

Then the man leaves this dreamy corner for a present that is unfolding by his beloved's silent steps through a park. As the wind rises and carries the clouds into the woods, her halting muted steps stir up a surge of sunshine that enshrouds the trees. How does this imagery find its place on our canvas? By some lighting tricks that link past and present, swirls of white à la Van Gogh capture the blurry clouds in their flight, and a few brushstrokes outline the walking figure in an atmospheric ambience where daubs of yellow set off the green of trees.

As the young woman continues her progress through the park, her eyes become round with ecstasy for now the sun scintillates in them for the first time. The sun, like a crystal gem

tel un joyau de cristal qui s'est logé dans ses yeux, projète à profusion ses rayons d'or. Et l'homme sent son coeur rempli d'une tristesse immense. Ironie suprême. L'irréalisable vient enfin à portée quand la jeune femme déborde de volupté sensuelle. Pourtant l'homme n'est pas exalté. Il succombe au doute que la réceptivité de la jeune femme n'est qu'une illusion. Tout comme Tantale il est soumis au supplice qui retire l'objet de son désir hors de portée dès qu'il s'efforce de le satisfaire. Telle est la tragédie qu'il est condamné à vivre dans son âme et dans son coeur.

Cependant non comme au début du trajet il y a maintenant un espoir naissant. Sur la toile un jardin apparaît dans les yeux de la jeune femme, baigné de soleil d'après-midi. Implantons ce jardin de fleurs dans ses pupilles dilatées d'où jaillissent des gerbes d'or. Enfin après d'innombrables automnes les deux rangées d'arbres qui bordent la marche de la jeune femme allument leurs sommets avec le soleil radiant comme autant de chandelles, et dirigent ses pas vers leur but ultime: ses yeux. À ce point la toile a atteint son épanouissement car le soleil s'était installé dans les yeux de l'amante de l'homme.

La couleur des yeux de la jeune femme est alors la couleur du soleil.

Notre oeuvre expressionniste est achevée. Et maintenant je vous présente *Le soleil cristallin*.

16 juin 2001

lodged in her eyes, sparkles with showers of gold. And the man's heart overflows with an immense sadness. Contemplate the irony of the situation. The unattainable has finally come within reach as his young woman now throbs with voluptuous sensuality. Yet he is not elated. He succumbs to the gnawing sense of despair that his sweetheart's accessibility is just an illusion. Like Tantalus he suffers the punishment of the reachable becoming the unreachable when he attempts to fulfill his desires. That is the tragedy that he is condemned to live in his soul and in his heart.

But unlike at the beginning of the journey there is now incipient hope. On our canvas appears a garden springing up in the middle of the young woman's eyes bathed in brilliant afternoon sunlight. Implant that flower garden in her dilated pupils that now send forth sheafs of gold. At last after countless autumns the twin rows of trees that line her progress light up their summits with radiant sun like so many candles, and channel it to its ultimate destination, her eyes. At this point the painting reaches its climax, for the sun has taken up residence in the eyes of the man's sweetheart.

The color of her eyes is now the color of sunshine.

Our expressionist piece is complete. And now I give you *Crystal Sunshine*.

16 June 2001

A Song by Trinh Cong Son

Nắng Thủy Tinh

Màu nắng hay là màu mắt em ?

Mùa thu mưa bay cho tay mềm,
Chiều nghiêng nghiêng bóng nắng qua thêm.
Rồi có hôm nào mây bay lên.

Lùa nắng cho buồn vào tóc em.
Bàn tay xanh xao đón ưu phiền.
Ngày xưa sao lá thu không vàng,
Và nắng chưa vào trong mắt em.

Em qua công viên bước chân âm thầm,
Ngoài kia gió mây về ngàn.
Cỏ cây chợt lên màu nắng.

Em qua công viên mắt em ngây tròn,
Lung linh nắng thủy tinh vàng,
Chợt hồn buồn dâng mênh mông.

Chiều đã đi vào vườn mắt em
Mùa thu qua tay đã bao lần
Ngàn cây thấp nền lên hai hàng
Để nắng đi vào trong mắt em.
Màu nắng bây giờ trong mắt em.

Le soleil cristallin

Crystal Sunshine

Est-ce la couleur du soleil ou celle de vos yeux?

Les pluies d'automne fouettent vos bras attendris.

Au coucher le soleil penche ses rayons au porche

Et fait envoler au ciel des nuages éthérés.

*Je chasse le soleil triste vers vos cheveux,
Et reçoit la mélancolie dans mes blêmes bras.*

Pourquoi les feuilles d'automne ne jaunissaient-elles pas,

Aussi le soleil n'entrait-il pas dans vos yeux?

Vous franchissez le parc à pas bien silencieux

Où le vent envoie aux bois ses nuages légers

Et les arbres sont tout arrosés de soleil,

Traversant le parc les yeux arrondis d'extase,

Où scintille le soleil au cristal doré.

'Tis the color of sunshine? Of your eyes?

As Fall's driving drizzles whip your arms soft,

Sunset bathes the porch in its slanting rays

And sends large whiffs of weightless cloud aloft.

Into your hair I sweep the sun rays' dolefulness,

And embrace in my languid arms melancholy.

Why did fall leaves not yellow in the long gone days,

And the sun not drop into your sweet eyes weary?

You crossed the park in quiet muffled steps

While wind into the woods hurried its clouds

Amid the trees soaked in the sun wind-swept

*Et je sens une immense tristesse sans
pareil.*

*Le soir a entré le beau jardin de vos yeux,
En d'innombrables voyages l'automne s'est
passé,
Les arbres allument tels des chandelles
leurs sommets
Pour permettre le soleil d'envahir vos
yeux.
Et maintenant, ma belle, le soleil est dans
vos yeux.*

*Traduit par Thomas D. Le
16 juin 2001*

Crossing the park with your eyes round
with ecstasy
Scintillating in the sun's crystal golden
shrouds,
And I feel the surge of sorrow's
immensity.

Sunset invades the garden of your eyes,
As Autumn comes and goes endlessly
by,
While the trees have lit candles on their
tops
To let the sun flow into your soft eyes.
And now, my love, the sun is in your
eyes.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
16 June 2001

Lê Mộng Nguyên

Dim Moon on the Mountain Spring

Written when the author was 19, in the midst of an uncertain era of Vietnamese history, the song *Dim Moon on the Mountain Spring* quickly captured the imagination of an entire post-war generation who was living through the premonition of a total struggle for independence. In the face of impending hostility, the educated urban youth was torn between the yearning for freedom and the longing for peace. The semblance of normalcy in political and economic life during those volatile years could only sharpen a sense of angst among a population that was growing increasingly restive in the aftermath of World War II. Some finally opted for the open struggle and vanished from their urban world while others stayed put with the quiet ambivalent resentment against the status quo.

It is at this momentous juncture that Lê Mộng Nguyên jumped on the escapist bandwagon of the romantic movement that was still lingering after decades of reign as the premier mode of expression among the urban literati. This creative impulse that animated so many poets of the Vietnamese struggle era permeated the cultural scene in the cities and towns while the rural communities were being rocked by the restlessness of rising expectations.

The song quickly won a place in the listeners' hearts evincing the deep yearning for a peace that was under threat, and for a chance to live the love of man and nature that was still elusive. All the radio stations in Saigon played the song day in and day out, year in and year out to an audience that never seemed to tire of its repetition. It is as if the entire population had found in it an expression of love that rose above conflicts of any kind.

19 February 2005

Trăng Mờ Bên Suối

Nhạc và Lời của Lê Mộng Nguyên

Người hẹn cùng ta đến bên bờ suối
Rừng chiều mờ sương ánh trăng mờ
chiều

Một đêm thiết tha rồi đây xa cách
Rồi đây hai ngả biết tới phương nào.

Mịt mù ngàn thâu suối mơ trầm lắng
Lòng buồn từ ly nhớ nhung chiều vắng
Người ơi nhớ khúc nhạc lòng đêm ấy
Ngàn đời vang nhắc bên suối trăng tà.

Suối mơ ! Lời hẹn ước ven bờ suối xưa
Nhớ chẳng ? Người phương xa trong
khói điêu tàn
Suối ơi ! Vờn theo bóng trăng vàng ngày
xanh
Nào những lúc trên thuyền say sưa nhìn
trăng vừa lên.

Ai hay chia lìa
Sương gió biên thù
Hiu hắt người đi sa trường xa.

Một ngày xa nhau xóa bao hình bóng
Trời bày chia ly chi cho lòng héo
Giờ đây cách xa người quên hay nhớ ?
Ngày xưa còn đó trăng nước mong chờ !

Làm tại Huế, chiều ngày 13 tháng 11
năm 1949
Lê Mộng Nguyên

Dim Moon on the Mountain Spring

Music and Lyrics by Lê Mộng Nguyên

That night my love and I met by the
mountain spring
Amidst the misty woods bathed in a
dim-lit moon
For just one night of love and then to
part so soon
Each one to the far unknown horizon
heading.

In countless nights by the silent dreamy
waters
My heart is rent, I feel lonely for one
beloved,
Wonder if she recalls that night the
music of
That echoes in my heart under the
moonlight clear.

O stream! Where is our old vow by your
water's edge?
Remember me the distant one in smoky
haze?
O stream! Where are the yellow moon of
younger days?
Boating under the rising moon drunken,
bewitched ?

Who has gone off
To the yonder windswept frontier,
And the forlorn battleground drear?

One day away from you faded my
memory.
Why did heaven make separation so
painful?
From way yonder do you still long for
me?
Old days still live, my love abides
soulful.

Translated by Thomas D. Le

6 February 2005

Từ Công Phụng**What Month Is It?****Bây Giờ Tháng Mấy**

Bây giờ tháng mấy rồi hỡi em ?
lênh đênh ngàn mây trôi êm đêm
Chiều nay nếu em đừng hờn dỗi,
trách nhau một lời thôi
Tâm hồn mình đâu lẻ đôi.

Bây giờ tháng mấy rồi hỡi em ?
Anh đi tìm màu hoa em cài
Chiều nay nhớ em rồi và nhớ
áo em đẹp màu thơ,
môi tràn đầy ước mơ

Mai đây anh đưa em đi về,
mưa giăng chiều nắng tàn
cho buốt lạnh chúng mình.
Em ơi, thôi đừng hờn anh nữa,
nhìn nhau buồn vời vợi,
để mùa đông buốt giá bờ vai mềm.

Bây giờ tháng mấy rồi hỡi em ?
Anh đi tìm mùa xuân trên đời
Mùa đông chết đi rồi mùa xuân
mắt em đẹp trời sao
cho mình thương nhớ nhau.

Từ Công Phụng

What Month Is It?

What month is it, my dear sweet one?
While bobbing clouds gently float by,
If you just keep your cool this eve
And speak only a mild reproach,
We'll never be so lonely, dear.

What month is it, my dear sweet one?
Looking for blooms to gild your dress,
I feel lonesome and miss you so,
In your lissome dress of romance,
Which fills my soul with deep longing.

I'll take you home on the morrow
Braving the rain that blots the sun
And chills us through to the marrow.
Don't chafe at me, sweetheart, for then
We'll feel sadness well up our eyes
Like cold winter on bare shoulders.

What month is it now, dear sweetheart?
I've got to find springtime in life
To dissipate dead winter's grip
And seize the bright stars in your eyes
So our true love will last and shine.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
30 June 2005

Nguyễn Văn Tý**Dư Âm**

"I wrote my first successful song *Ai Xây Chiến Lũy* (Who Built the Fort) in 1949," said Nguyen Van Ty as he reflected on his musical career, whose early songs had gone unnoticed. At the inception of the war against the French, this rousing song was destined to receive a wild acclaim among the revolutionaries.

But it is *Dư Âm* (Echoes of Memories) that catapulted the artist to a fame that in the martial and politically charged atmosphere of the incipient struggle was as unexpected as it was emblematic of the emotional makeup of the Vietnamese people in and out of the revolution. *Dư Âm* spread like wildfire on the lips of everyone who heard it. The barracks and the homes, the school campuses and the streets, the hinterland and the cities, and the ubiquitous radio resounded endearingly with the soft and dreamy melody. The song's catchy tune and above all its moving words of love at first sight resonate in every heart, even today.

Its popularity must have caught Nguyen Van Ty by surprise, for such a "bourgeois" song in revolutionary time was not only out of place but potentially "decadent" and deleterious to the soldiers' fighting spirit, especially when he himself was the leader of the performing arts group of Division 304, Interzone 4 with a rank equivalent to battalion commander. Disciplined and censured, he was sent around every unit to denounce his own creation. It was a fool's errand, for every time he started his self-condemnation, he would be greeted with roars of laughter, both of approval and of disbelief.

Born 5 March 1923 at Vinh, Nghe An Province, into a musical family, Nguyen Van Ty received his education at the National School of Vinh, where he distinguished himself by his singing and acting skills. By his own admission, five people helped shape his musical future: his own talented father renowned for mastery of many genres of folk music, who had migrated to Nghe An from the North; a member of the local military (Blue-Culottes) brass band, who taught him music theory; his French teacher, Ms. Nigon of Paris; Father Bresson, a Spanish priest, who had him sing hymns during Mass and taught him rudiments of composition; and Mr. Manh Hinh, a Chinese acquaintance, who taught him the guitar.

Not content with being just a singer, he decided to write his own songs. After several initial failed attempts, he finally gained recognition with *Ai Xây Chiến Lũy* (Who Built the Fort) in 1949, a song which another musician couple helped spread among villagers up and down the countryside.

The same year at age 26, he led the performing unit of Division 304 on a tour of duty in Quỳnh Lưu, Nghệ An. Through a friend, he had been introduced to a family with two girls of marriageable age. While he was visiting with the 22-year-old elder sister, he suddenly caught the riveting gaze of her younger sixteen-year-old sibling, who was leaning on her sister's shoulder. The musician was mesmerized, deeply smitten. The situation so incensed the older sister that she forbade him to ever see her again. However, on the last night of his tour, he came by to bid farewell. The visit took place in the front yard under bright moonlight. Suddenly he caught sight of the younger sister, sitting some distance away, her just-washed hair spread out over her shoulders to dry, and singing softly to the accompaniment of her guitar. What she was singing, he could not make out. But the image of the nubile girl discreetly singing to him in the shadow of moonlight followed him back to his own unit. Although he was never to see her again, he captured the intense emotions he was feeling in a melody of words and sounds of pure love, albeit unfulfilled, conceived at a distance and fated to remain platonic.

The timeless *Dư Âm* (Echoes of Memories) spoke to a generation of Vietnamese at a

crucial juncture of their country's history. That the song spread so rapidly from the young men and women who took up arms in the country to their contemporaries in cities and towns regardless of their political inclinations can only be explained by its universal appeal to the most basic human emotion of love, love that transcends politics, ideology, time, and anything else that tends to divide humanity.

27 June 2007

Dư Âm

Echoes of Memories

Nhạc và Lời của Nguyễn Văn Tý

Music and Lyrics by Nguyễn Văn Tý

Đêm qua mơ dáng em đang ôm đàn diu
muôn tiếng tơ
Không gian trầm lắng như âu yếm ru ai
trong giấc mơ
Mái tóc nhẹ rung, trăng vờn làn gió
Yêu ai anh nắm cung đàn đầy vui đôi mắt
xa vời

Anh yêu tiếng hát êm như lời nguyện
đẹp bao ước mơ
Anh như lầu vắng em như ánh trăng reo
muôn ý thơ
Muốn nói cùng em đôi lời triu mến....
Tim anh băng giá đang ngại ngùng câu
năm tháng mong chờ

Hẹn em từ muôn kiếp trước
Nhớ em mấy thuở bạc đầu
Anh đã âu sầu vì đường tơ vương vẩn
Em để cung đàn đưa anh về đâu ?

Dư âm tiếng hát reo lên trong lòng anh
bao nhớ nhung
Đê mê lòng nhớ đêm qua giấc mơ môi
em hé rung
Anh muốn thành mây nương nhờ làn gió
Đưa anh tới cõi mơ hồ nào đây muôn
kiếp bên nàng.

Nguyễn Văn Tý
1949

Last night I dreamt of you coaxing
verses from your guitar,
All through its vast stillness, so sweet a
lullaby to me,
In moon-lit breeze watching your hair
swaying gently,
With love I played the notes of praise to
your beauty.

Loving your voice, a pledge mellow as
in a dream,
I am suchlike a vacant loft and you a
bright moonbeam
Pouring verses onto my tender words of
love;
My heart withers from lonely years of
yearning love.

It seems as if we had a date from
previous life,
For I miss you, sweetheart, until my
final day,
Bearing this sorrow deep within my
tortured soul.
Where will your tune take me,
whichever way?

Your song's echoes caused such deep
loneliness in me;
Feverishly dreaming of your trembling
parted lips,
I want to be a cloud riding the wind that
whips
To you and some dreamland for all
eternity.

Translated by Thomas D. Le

27 June 2007

Đặng Thế Phong (1918 – 1942)

Con Thuyền Không Bến

With just three love songs, *Đêm Thu* (Autumn Night), *Con Thuyền Không Bến* (Adrift), and *Giọt Mưa Thu* (Autumn Raindrops), Đặng Thế Phong joined the pantheon of great Vietnamese songwriters of the pre-war years. He ranked among the pioneers of modern Vietnamese music, seamlessly melding the traditional pentatonic scale with Western heptatonic scale. The song *Con Thuyền Không Bến* is an example of this type of composition. The theme of autumn permeating his repertoire, small as it is, has the power to unleash an avalanche of autumn songs that lasts to this day, to the delight of the Vietnamese audience.

A native of Nam Dinh Province, birthplace of an impressive succession of talented musicians: Đan Thọ, Hoàng Trọng, Nguyễn Xuân Khoát (1910), Văn Chung (1914), Lê Yên (1917), Nguyễn Văn Thương (1919), Bùi Công Kỳ (1919), Lưu Hữu Phước (1921), Đỗ Nhuận (1922), and Phan Huỳnh Điểu (1924), Đặng Thế Phong rose to prominence as a songwriter of the Romantic movement and was glorified by universal accolade. His memory is further honored by the tragedy of his short life. Born into a family of civil servants in 1918, the second of six children, whose father, Đặng Hiến Thế, died early, he managed to gain an eighth-grade education before dire financial circumstances forced him to seek employment by moving to Hanoi, where for a while he enrolled as an auditor at the College of Fine Arts. He earned a meager income by illustrating the magazine *Học Sinh*. (Young Students) under the editorship of the detective story writer Phạm Cao Củng, while financing his further education. For the magazine, he produced the literary comics *Hoàng Tử Sọ Dừa*. (Prince Coconut Shell) and *Giặc Cờ Đen* (The Black Flag Bandits). In the spring of 1941, he left for Saigon, then went on to Phnom Penh, Kampuchea, where he offered music classes until his return to Hanoi in the fall. One story says it is in Phnom Penh that he completed the song *Con Thuyền Không Bến*, which debuted, sung by himself, in the Olympia theater in Hanoi upon his return. However, a probably more credible source, as we shall see below, places the writing of this song in 1940 over the Thuong River, and the premiere also took place this year. Severe privations, long unsuccessful travels, and tuberculosis (though he also had meningitis) finally took his life in early 1942 at the age of 24. It is said that he finished writing his last song, *Giọt Mưa Thu* (Autumn Raindrops), on his deathbed in a small loft on Hang Dong Street in Nam Dinh.

Musician Lê Hoàng Long tells the story of the song as an insider. In 1940, Đặng Thế Phong had to go to Bắc Giang Province for a few days. This province is traversed by the Thuong River, which clearly shows its two currents, one clearer than the other running side by side, probably because of the difference in the amount of sediments. One bright moon-lit night Dang and his friends rented a boat, moored it, and were enjoying the evening over drinks when he received a handwritten note saying his girlfriend Miss Tuyet had taken ill. For the remainder of the night Dang grew silent

and worried. That night, restless and finding sleep elusive, he began to write *Con Thuyền Không Bến*, which he finished before daybreak. Two days later he was back in Nam Dinh, and Miss Tuyet miraculously recovered on seeing him. In the chill of fall and its light breeze the two lovers met under moonlight. He softly sang the just-written melody into her ears, and the world has a new song, whose perennial themes of love and autumn and moonlight once again rise to stir every Vietnamese heart.

Commenting on the lyrics, famed folklorist-songwriter-singer Pham Duy emphasizes the malaise of the young generation, who keenly felt the oppressiveness of the colonial regime and could relate to the aimless drift of the boat on the currents of the Thuong River, the metaphor for the currents of events, which they were powerless to change. To Pham Duy it had to be a boat that is adrift on the Thuong River of two distinct currents, it had to be autumn which brings its cold wind, the haze that reaches to the cloud front, the wind that whistles among the pines, and the moon that lights the landscape to arouse the *Zeitgeist* in the Vietnamese soul of the time, the tenderness, the pain, the melancholy, the love of kinfolk and land, which remain the motifs across all genres of artistic creation. A boat adrift on the Seine in the summer would never elicit any kind of meaningful response.

11 July 2007

Con Thuyền Không Bến

Adrift

Nhạc và Lời của Đặng Thế Phong

Music and Lyrics by Dang The Phong

Đêm nay thu sang cùng heo may
Đêm nay sương lam mờ chân mây
Thuyền ai lơ lững trôi xuôi dòng
Như nhớ thương ai chùng tơ lòng.

Tonight autumn arrives with chilly breeze
While bluish haze hovers at the clouds' feet.
A boat slowly drifts down river in peace
Yearning lonely for one it longs to meet.

Trong cây hơi thu cùng heo may
Vì vu qua muôn cảnh mơ say
Miền xa lời gió vang thông ngàn
Ai oán thương ai tàn mơ màng.

The breath of fall cuts through the icy limbs
Of trees whistling drunken as in a dream.
Far wind amidst the pines murmurs its hymns.
Whose love so painful gasps in its last gleam?

Lướt theo chiều gió, một con thuyền
theo trăng trong
Trôi trên sông Thương nước chảy đôi dòng.
Biết đâu bờ bến, thuyền ơi, thuyền trôi
nơi đâu
Trên con sông Thương nào ai biết nông sâu.

Gliding downwind the boat bathes in bright moon
Upon the Thuong waters split up in twin ribbons.
Where is thy cove, small boat, and whereto soon
Upon the Thuong, which no one can fathom?

Nhớ khi chiều sương cùng ai trắc ắc tấm lòng
Biết bao buồn thương, thuyền mơ buông trôi xuôi dòng.
Bến mơ dù thiết tha, thuyền ơi đừng chờ mong.

Ánh trăng mờ chiếu một con thuyền
trong đêm thâu,
Trên sông bao la, thuyền mơ bến nơi
đâu.

Đặng Thế Phong
1940

Recall one fog-shroud eve and our
tormented pain,
Those sad longings the boat carried
downstream.
Though loving harbor waits, O boat,
tarry in vain.

And so this dim-lit night the boat lost in
darkness
Upon the vast river, it roves aimless.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
10 July 2007

Lê Trọng Nguyễn (1926 – 2004)

Nắng Chiều

Lê Trọng Nguyễn was born 1 May 1926 in the District of Điện Bàn, Quảng Nam Province. After his father died when he was young, he and his sister were raised by their mother. From 1942 to 1945 Lê studied in Hanoi, where he became friends with noted musicians Nguyễn Xuân Khoát, Lê Ngọc Châu, Đỗ Thế Phiệt, and the slightly older Dương Thiệu Tước of *Bóng Chiều Xưa* (Evening Shadow of Yore) fame, Thẩm Oánh, and Nguyễn Thiện Tơ. His closest friend by his own admission was Phạm Đình Chương, another illustrious musician. All of them are stars in the Vietnamese pre-war constellation of the famously productive Romantic era.

His musical training was largely autodidactic. He borrowed music texts from a Catholic institution to learn harmony and counterpoint. Later, after his return from the *maquis*, he took a correspondence course in composition from *Ecole Universelle* in France. Upon completion, he joined the French *La Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique* (SACEM, the Association of Authors, Composers, and Publishers of Music). Then he became a teacher of music at the Nguyễn Duy Hiệu High School in Bình Định Province. By this time he had written a number of songs, the best known of which was *Sóng Đà giang* (The Waves of Da Giang), which is the Thu Bồn River in Quảng Nam Province. This song was aired by Radio France-Asie after its program director Đan Trường, who was stationed in Paris, approved it for its weekly radio program beamed to Vietnamese back home.

After 1945 he joined the Resistance movement against the French, in which he was put in charge of the entire musical operations of Interzone 5, which included the provinces of Quảng Nam, Quảng Ngãi, Bình Định and Phú Yên. The hardscrabble life in the incipient war with its stringent demands, coupled with the poverty besieging his family, took such a toll on him that he had to return to the city, where he eventually entered the business world. In 1965 he became General Manager of the French commercial firm Centra Co. From there he moved to Sealand Corp. in Da Nang as chief operating officer in 1968. After his marriage to Nguyễn Thị Nga in

1970, he left for Saigon, where he became chief executive officer of the Cuu Long Oil Company. When Saigon fell in 1975, a Sealand captain, who was a friend, sent him a note asking him to leave the country on his ship. Judging that he and his family would have a hard time starting all over in an English-speaking country, he refused. What finally decided his departure was the visit he had from Nguyễn Xuân Khoát, who came from the North looking for him shortly after the fall of Saigon. In a very frank discussion Nguyễn advised him to leave. But it took him until March of 1983 to reach the United States, and settle in Rosemead, California with his wife and their adult children, three daughters and a son. Once settled he found the materialism surrounding him had negated all the values with which he was familiar in Vietnam. He found it hard to resume writing songs, for he had lost touch with the audience and the purpose. It seemed that the fire was going out of him. With his children all grown and gone and the old ailment resurging, life was becoming increasingly difficult. He died on 9 January 2004 of lung cancer in Rosemead.

Although not prolific as a songwriter, Lê Trọng Nguyễn composed a portfolio of lyrical and romantic love songs which distinguish themselves by their polished style and accomplished language of love: *Lá Rơi Bên Thềm* (Leaves Fallen on the Porch), *Sao Đêm* (Night Stars, which he considered his favorite), *Chiều Bên Giáo Đường* (A Church at Sunset), *Bến Giang Đầu* (The Giang Dau Boat Landing). His most famous, most performed and most beloved song, is, without a doubt, *Nắng Chiều* (Crepuscular Sun). For good reason, the song also found favor among an enthusiastic audience in Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The Chinese musician Kỳ Lộ Hà wrote the Chinese lyrics for it, and renamed it “The Love Song of Viet Nam,” which became a smash hit in Hong Kong and Taiwan. For many years the press here eulogized it as the Best Song That Honors Love.

Genesis of *Nắng Chiều*

After the Japanese forces deposed the French authorities on 9 March 1945, a civil servant family of the Vietnamese Crown fled Qui Nhon Province for the safety of Hoi An, where Lê lived after he left the *maquis*. The family had a daughter, whom he loved. He was nineteen, and the love was to remain platonic, the Viet Minh having caused their separation by a forced evacuation of towns and cities. Still he felt an obligation and nurtured the dream of some day writing a song in memory of that love.

It would be many years before the opportunity arrived when he found a job at the Radio Station in Hue, the capital of Central Vietnam. Here he met other famous artists and musicians, including Vũ Đức Duy, Nguyễn Hữu Ba, Lưu Quang Nhạc, Vĩnh Phan, a virtuoso on the sixteen-string zither and a thoroughgoing artist; and Văn Giang, author of another well-loved song *Ai Về Sông Thương* (You who Go to Tuong River). He would lead a life typical of a libertine, which he later characterized as conferring a cachet to his work¹ during an interview with a reporter from the online Vietnamese music organization, Vietnhac.org. He would spend the day at the Radio Station, and his evening hours on the legendary boats moored on the equally legendary Perfume River with friends and denizens of the demi-monde, a way of life that had no other victim than himself. Regardless, through his friend Vũ Đức Duy, who was a relative of the Empress *Douairiere* and mother of later Emperor Bao Dai, he was for a time lodged in the An Dinh Palace, which had been built for Emperor Khải Định on the An Cựu River outside of the Imperial City. The palace was blown up by the Viet Minh in the night of 19 December 1946 as part of the scorched-earth

policy aimed at denying resources to the returning French forces. It is in the partially demolished An Dinh Palace that he composed the masterpiece *Nắng Chiều*, which he completed, as he recalled, in about half an hour. The spark of inspiration, however, came from a beautiful girl of the Hoang family who was holding the crown of Hue's beauty queendom. Sitting on the edge of the lotus pond, her graceful figure triggered a flood of memory back to the days of his first love. And the song almost wrote itself, naturally. The year was 1952.

Paradoxically Lê Trọng Nguyễn, in the above interview, professed to dislike the *Nắng Chiều* because it was sung to death without anyone knowing who the author was. Not that he had this feeling at first. On the contrary, he was quite satisfied; the piece was well-written, solid, balanced in every way. But its surpassing popularity was such that it eclipsed its creator in fame and recognition.

The lyrics were set to the sensual rhythm of rumba bolero. The rumba is a family of styles of very expressive dance involving suggestive movements of the body, particularly the hips, footwork and arms styling. It arose in the West Indies from Congolese roots as a sex pantomime, accompanied generally by hand percussion. Over three hundred years, it has evolved into its many present forms in Cuba, various Latin American countries, the United States and Spain and is now part of the repertoire of ballroom dancing. Vigorous and fast in its origin, the dance also has spawned slow variants. The bolero is slower, sentimental, lush, romantic. In *Nắng Chiều* the effects of the words combined with music and dance are stunning. It can be performed languorously or briskly to create a panoply of sensations and delights unmatched in their evocative power.

15 July 2007.

Nắng Chiều

Nhạc và Lời của Lê Trọng Nguyễn

Rumba Boléro

Qua bến nước xưa lá hoa về chiều
lạnh lùng mềm đưa trong nắng lụa thưa
khi đến cuối thôn chân bước không hồn
Nhớ sao là nhớ đến người ngày thơ.

Anh nhớ trước đây dáng em gầy gầy
Dịu dàng nhìn anh đôi mắt long lanh
Anh nhớ bước em khi nắng vương thềm
Má em màu ngà tóc thề nhẹ bay.

Nay anh về qua sân nắng
chạnh nhớ câu thề tim tái tê
chẳng biết bây giờ người em gái duyên
ghé về đâu.

Crepuscular Sun

Music and Lyrics by Lê Trọng Nguyễn

Rumba Boléro

Stepping onto the old dusky leaf-girt
landing,
Where flowers swayed so softly in the
waning sun,
I reached the hamlet's edge mindlessly
numb
From loneliness for old beloved,
heartache gnawing.

Recalling her a lithe and slender girl of
yore,
Sweet eyes whose sparkling gaze meant
love me true;
I fancied her steps through the sun-
bathed porch,

Nay anh về nương dâu úa
giọng hát câu hò thôi hết đưa
hình bóng yêu kiều kẻ hoa tím biết đâu
mà tìm

Anh nhớ xót xa dưới tre lá ngà
Gợn buồn nhìn anh em nói “Mến anh!”
Mây lướt thướt trôi khi nắng vương đôi
Nhớ em dịu hiền nắng chiều ngừng trôi.

Lê Trọng Nguyễn
1952

Her bobbing hair stroking her face a
creamy hue.

Now I am back crossing the sun-swept
yard,
Memories of the old love oath tighten
my heart,
Wondering where my former sweet has
given hers.

Now that I'm back to dear wilted
mulberry row;
Her voice no longer sings the old folk
songs.
Where did her shapely figure by the
pansies go?

My wounded heart carries the saddened
sight of you,
Who said, “love you” under the silver-
leaf bamboo.
The straggling clouds floating across the
sun-soaked hill
Evoke the thought of gentle you in
twilight still.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
1 July 2007

Note:

1. Nguyễn Phúc. *Nói chuyện với nhạc sĩ Lê Trọng Nguyễn*. 13 July 2007.
<http://www.vietnhac.org/baivo/letrongnguyen.html>

Dương Thiệu Trúc (1915 – 1995)

Bóng Chiều Xưa

Saigon in the early 1950s lived in a surreal era. In the aftermath of World War II, the French authorities had reestablished themselves, the State of Vietnam had been created within the French Union while the Viet Minh (the Vietnamese movement that fought for independence from the French) was waging in the countryside a war of attrition, which the French had to confront. The Viet Minh held sway over large swaths of the remote rural areas, especially at night, leaving the towns, cities and other rural areas under the control of the French and the State of Vietnam. The city of Saigon, largely removed from the conflict, was throbbing with economic and cultural activity. The war, however, was in everyone's mind, and the atmosphere of indifference to the war, which pervaded among certain segments of the population,

was symptomatic of a defense mechanism that the Saigonese erected to survive the carnage.

The cultural and divertissement world was particularly vibrant. The cinema, the theater, the performing arts, the restaurants, the casinos, the race track, the stadium, the night clubs offered the only opportunities for the mass entertainment and relaxation of a population who went about its daily business with as much gusto as resignation. And if traces of hedonism were discovered here and there, at different times, the Saigonese might be absolved for their general gutsiness and resilience.

Saigon by day was a beehive of humanity jamming all major arteries with absurd traffic both vehicular and pedestrian, enjoying sidewalk cafés and vendors French style or local style, surging incessantly over every inch of real estate available, and carrying on frenetic business. It was a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, crowded, but thoroughly exciting metropolis, unique in its allure and mélange of sights and sounds. The streets of Saigon were an arena of deadly contest between the sea of bicyclists engulfing streams of motorists with death-defying acts of weaving, sparring, parrying, evading, and speeding. Saigon at night was neon-lit, noisy, crisscrossed by vehicular and pedestrian traffic only slightly less crazy than its daytime counterpart. It is the time when the urban middle class came out in force to redeem a modicum of sanity amidst a war whose guns could sometimes be heard rumbling in the distance. It was an unplanned large-scale invasion of the most pacific kind. The targets were invariably the theaters, the cinemas, the restaurants, the casinos, the night clubs, the sidewalk cafés, the sidewalk vendors of local fare. The revelers swarmed relentlessly, the business owners grinned broadly. Saigon was the quintessence of entrepreneurial Vietnam. Consciously or not, the town plays its free-wheeling role with charming abandon. But oh, where are the snows of yesteryear?

This parallel universe that was Saigon was where I first heard a song I kept hearing and re-hearing every time I went to the movies. This was a time when the movie feature came last in the program. Moviegoers selected their movie theaters as much for the feature film as for the stage attractions that preceded it. Sometimes these attractions even became the deciding factor. For an hour or so, the audience was feted regally by an endless stream of performing artists. Singers would sing solos or in duets; instrumentalists would play pianos, accordions, guitars, violins, or cellos; dancers would be doing routines ranging from tap to tango. Then comedians in short skits, clowns with their ridiculous tricks, and magicians sawing beauties in half might be next to bring down the house. In a more serious vein, short plays might be put on to bring the event to a dramatic close. In short, one could expect anything and everything for Saigon asked for nothing less than the *dolce vita*. Confound the war!

Bóng Chiều Xưa, flowing mellifluously from stage attractions to the radio, captured my imagination with its lyrical nature and romance. To listen to this composition is to let oneself enter a land of enchantment, a realm of soothing reverie in order to savor a touch of melancholy and nostalgia, while living vicariously the wonders and heartaches of love. It was all wrought by an accomplished hand who knows the workings of the human heart and the mystery of love.

Dương Thiệu Tước was born 15 May 1915 into a traditional scholarly family in the Village of Vân Đình, Sơn Lăng Sub-District of the District of Ứng Hòa in Hà Đông Province. Grandson of the Master of Letters Vân Đình Dương Khuê, who headed the

Education Department of Nam Định Province, Dương Thiệu Tước received his education in Hà Nội. In the 1930's he joined an amateur band called Myosotis, along with other musicians of note, namely Thẩm Oánh, Lê Yên, Doãn Mẫn, and Vũ Khánh. He was the first songwriter to use French lyrics, "French songs in Vietnamese garb," as he called them, thus blazing another trail for modern Vietnamese music. For a while he was professor of music at the National School of Music in Saigon. He first married Lương Thị Thuần; their children are now living in Germany and in the United States. His second wife, Minh Trang, was a famous singer in the 1950s. He died in Ho Chi Minh City on 1 August 1995.

Throughout the war with the French, which ended in 1954, Dương Thiệu Tước created song after song of love, which taps deep into his exquisite artistic sensibility and his tender heart to create elegance of idiom and expression on the nuances of unforgettable melody.

His much-loved works, which have not diminished in popularity, include not exhaustively *Áng Mây Chiều* (Evening Clouds), *Bến Xuân Xanh* (Green Spring Crossing), *Cánh Bàng Lướt Gió* (Sailing in the Wind), *Chiều* (Evening), a poem by Hồ Dzếnh set to music, *Đêm Tàn Bến Ngự* (Wee Hours at Ngự Crossing), *Kiếp Hoa* (Life of Flowers), *Ngọc Lan* (Orchids), *Ôi Quê Xưa* (Oh, Native Land), *On Nghĩa Sinh Thành* (Filial Piety), *Thuyền Mơ* (Boat of Dreams), *Tiếng Xưa* (Sounds of Old), *Uớc Hẹn Chiều Thu* (Autumn Eve Promise), and, of course, *Bóng Chiều Xưa* (Evening Shadow of Yore).

16 July 2007

Bóng Chiều Xưa

Evening Shadow of Yore

Nhạc và Lời của Dương Thiệu Tước

Music and Lyrics by Duong Thieu Tuoc

Một chiều ái ân
Say hồn ta bao lần.
Một trời đắm duyên thơ.
Cho đời bao phút ơ thờ.

One night of love, honey,
Infused my soul with tipsiness.
A heaven filled with ecstasy,
Then life became lifeless.

Ngạt ngào sắc hương
Tay cầm tay luyến thương.
Đôi mắt em nhìn càng say đắm mơ màng
nào thấy đâu sầu vương.

Suffused in perfume and beauty
We joined our hands with tenderness.
With rapturous wide eyes dreamy
We had banished *tristesse*.

Một chiều bên nhau.
Một chiều vui sống quên phút tang bồng.
Anh ơi nhớ chẳng xa anh em hát
khúc ca nhớ mong.

In one evening of togetherness
Our love's joy dulls your wanderlust.
Sweetheart, know that I sing
My lonesome thoughts when you're away.

Một chiều gió mưa
Em về thăm chốn xưa.
Non nước u buồn nào đâu bóng cố nhân
lòng xót xa tình xưa.

Then late one rainy day
I went back to the dear old land
Whose mournful face seemed sad to say,

Lâng lâng chiều mơ.
 Một chiều băng khuâng đầu nguồn thơ.
 Mây vương sầu lan
 Gió ơi đưa hồn về làng cũ nhẩn thàn
 lời nguyện ước trong chiều xưa.

Thương nhau làm chi.
 âm thầm lệ vương khi biệt ly.
 Xa xôi làm chi.
 Vô tình em nhớ duyên hờ.
 Tình như mây khói.
 Bóng ai xa mờ.

Dương Thiệu Tước
 1951

Old friend had left; my heart was rent.

On that evening of dreams
 Forlorn, pray where did the muse go?
 O clouds that weave webs of sorrow,
 O, wind, take me to old town for
 Me to whisper love vows of yore.

Why did we get involved in love,
 So that tears fall to say good-bye?
 Why did we have to part our ways
 So that I'm left with tattered love,
 The love that has gone up in smoke
 And lover mine fading in the distance?

Translated by Thomas D. Le
 12 July 2007

Cung Tiến

Thu Vàng

Cung Tiến, born Cung Thúc Tiến, on 27 November 1938 in Hà Nội, received his early musical training in high school under musicians Thẩm Oánh and Chung Quân. In late 1950s while pursuing economic studies in Australia he took courses in piano, harmony, counterpoint, and composition. In the early 1970s he accumulated additional knowledge in music theory, music history and musicology while at Cambridge, England working on an advanced economics degree.

He has written a number of well-loved songs, among which *Thu Vàng* (Golden Fall) endears itself to a very appreciative audience among young and old alike.

Treating the favorite Vietnamese theme of autumn, *Thu Vàng*, however, speaks with a different voice. It is not a story of love which quite a few autumn songs recount, but a vaguely nostalgic and melancholy elegy to self. The haunting but soft cries of sadness, forlornness, and loneliness, the indeterminate and amorphous feelings of something ineffable but real, permeate every step of this solitary, aimless wanderer (our speaker) on the road to nowhere. With no destination in mind, in fact, with no mind to anything rooted in external reality, the wayfarer sees himself drifting with the rhythm of the leaves detaching themselves from their homes to stumble just as aimlessly as the speaker straggling across the autumnal landscape.

Autumn glides gently in, bringing with it an atmosphere laden with a mild, pervasive perfume and the golden threads of autumn catching on the speaker's shoulders. Overwhelmed by autumnal enchantment, with his heart lingering in distant climes, weighed down by melancholy, he speaks of the sound of falling leaves and the season that snares his soul in a web of tender emotions. He is enraptured by the strange seduction of fall, of the leaves in their journey to decay, of the last freshness they still

carry as he picks them up, only to hear—and here is a delicious synesthesia—the colors of dreariness floating about, the colors of his inner self.

The only mention of love in this elegy is the love of Autumn, a personification that reifies love from the indifference of the passage of time, out of the indistinct haze of fall into a state of consciousness that can give the speaker the relief he longs for. The deadened sound of numbness of soul is the only sound remaining to perceive in the middle of all this silently colorful, or his colorfully silent, world.

So today, the speaker, our wayfarer, still in the grips of nostalgia, looks to the cloudy sky as the one inner space that still shines, the place from which he is able to grasp the aroma of Golden Fall.

Get ready for the majestic tune of this waltz, Autumn-loving souls!

Thomas D. Le
12 August 2007

Thu Vàng

Nhạc và Lời của Cung Tiến

Chiều hôm qua lang thang trên đường
Hoàng hôn xuống, chiều thấm muôn hương
chiều hôm qua mình tôi băng khuâng
Có mùa Thu về, tơ vàng vương vương

Một mình đi lang thang trên đường
Buồn hiu hắt và nhớ băng khuâng
Lòng xa xôi và sầu mênh mông.
Có nghe lá vàng nào nề rơi không

Mùa Thu vàng tới là mùa lá vàng rơi
Và lá vàng rơi, khi tình Thu vừa khơi
Nhặt lá vàng rơi, xem màu lá còn tươi
Nghe chừng đâu đây màu tê tái

Chiều hôm qua lang thang trên đường
Nhớ nhớ, buồn buồn với chán chường
Chiều hôm nay trời nhiều mây vương
Có mùa Thu Vàng bao nhiêu là hương.

Cung Tiến

Golden Fall

Music and Lyrics by Cung Tiến

Late yesterday I ambled on the road,
Twilight descended 'midst the fragrant air.
And I alone bore such heart-stricken load;
With golden threads fall came my heart to snare

Lonesome I strolled aimlessly on my way
Weighed down, forlorn I pined for bygone days,
I was deep drowned in vast gloom and sadness
Hearing the dead leaves fall doleful, endless.

Advancing fall spelled yellow leaves shedding
In tumbling gold with autumn love dawning.
I picked a leaf that fell in its freshness
And vaguely heard the fall colors' numbness.

Late yesterday I rambled on my way,
Depressed spirits plunged deep in nostalgia.

Today the overcast sky in its last ray
Imbues the Golden Fall with aroma.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
12 August 2007

Thông Đạt

Ai Về Sông Tương

How does it feel to be jilted by the woman you love? Literature is replete with stories of broken hearts in both sexes, for as long as there are men and women, the story of love never ends, and neither does the pain caused by the ones to the others. Each such story bears the same anguish, desolation, and devastation, which are tell-tale signs of the hazards of love. Yet each generation creates swarms of moths rushing headlong, as if impelled by suicidal intent, toward the inevitable flame of love, which is bound to consume some while leaving others more or less scathed. In this game, repeated ad infinitum across all boundaries of age, sex, religion, and so on, the losers probably outnumber the winners. Is it fate, karma, predestination, or some other inexplicable force that wrought such deep emotional scars among lovers? Perhaps, it is simply the human condition to suffer in a relentless pursuit of happiness. Perhaps, in their brief appearance on the stage, the human players just try to muddle through until each looks back at the end of the play a great deal wiser and calmer while waiting for the exit.

The jilted man must be one of the most wretched human beings that ever live. Yet, the song *Ai về sông Tương* deals with rejection in love with a lyricism ennobled by dignity and grace. The pain he feels, though acute, does not embitter him or turn him into a misogynist. It is this gentlemanly, almost chivalrous, attitude toward his predicament that raises him above the pathology of rancor. This wounded heart resides in a soul who refrains from melodramatic outpourings while still sending out the message of hurt and suffering, not to shame his former Dulcinea, but to let her know what a wretch he is. He utters no condemnation, accepts the verdict, but places the responsibility on the woman who broke her word and his heart. As a man he wishes her no evil and bears his crucible alone with quiet resignation. And if he sheds tears, it is for both of them.

Story has it that Văn Giảng, born 12 May 1925 at Hue, wrote the ballad *Ai về sông Tương*, as a response to a challenge of his musical publisher, Tăng Duyệt, whose Tinh Hoa Publishing House in Hue had placed into circulation many of Văn Giảng's military marches. One day Tăng Duyệt remarked half in jest that Văn Giảng was good at composing marches but love songs were not his specialty. Without a word, the songwriter quietly went home and, in short order, created the deeply lyrical *Ai về sông Tương*, which he sent to the radio stations in Saigon, Hue, and Hanoi under the pseudonym Thông Đạt. The year was 1949. Almost overnight, the airwaves were filled with the moving lament of a man whose mistress had dumped in favor of another. Publisher Tăng Duyệt, wanting to buy rights to the smash hit, asked Văn Giảng if he knew the author, to which the latter replied in the negative. Shortly

afterwards the musician Đỗ Kim Bằng and the novelist Lữ Hồ, in a visit to Văn Giảng's house, saw the draft of *Ai về sông Tương* lying on his desk. Thông Đạt now stands alongside Văn Giảng as another creative talent not only in the musical world but on the literary scene as well.

The song was loved by every man and woman in the post-World War II era, even though quite a few of them never experienced the pain of rejection. It's a song that resonated with every heart, who yearns to live vicariously the feelings of forlornness induced by a lost love. And six decades later it still fills the listener with melancholy, tenderness, and nostalgia.

A small controversy surrounds the origin of the Tuong River. Văn Giảng has explained that the story was created out of thin air. Still that does not prevent certain scholarly commentators to maintain that the Tuong River referred to in the song must be the same Tuong River that waters the southern Chinese Province of Quang Dong, reputed to be the original homeland of the Bach Viet tribes, who are the ancestors of present-day Vietnamese. Others hold that the river's name Tuong is chosen simply to rhyme with the following verse in the lyrics:

*Ai có về bên bến sông Tương,
nhấn người duyên dáng tôi thương,*

To this writer, it is unlikely that the Tuong River is anything but an invention by Văn Giảng. He never needed to go to the far reaches of history in order to write THE SONG OF THE JILTED LOVER.

Thomas D. Le
18 September 2007

Ai Về Sông Tương

Nhạc và Lời của Thông Đạt

Ai có về bên bến sông Tương,
nhấn người duyên dáng tôi thương,
bao ngày ôm mối tơ vương.
Tháng vơi ngày mơ nhuốm đau thương,
tâm hồn mơ bóng em luôn,
mong vài lời em ngập hương.

Thu nay về vương ánh thê lương,
vắng người duyên dáng tôi thương,
mối tình tôi vẫn cô đơn.
Xa muôn trùng lưu luyến nhớ em,
mơ hoài hình bóng không quên,
hương tình mộng say dịu êm

Bao ngày qua
Thu lại về mang sầu tới
Nàng say tình mới hồn tôi toi bời,

Tell Her, My Heartbreaker

Music and Lyrics by Thông Đạt

You who travel to Tuong River landing,
Please tell the graceful girl I love
That I live in insufferable pain.
For all these months in keen heartache,
Within my soul I dream of her
Hoping to hear her mellow words again.

This autumn comes shrouded in
mournful veil,
Pining after my love to no avail,
I'm still struggling with lonesomeness.
From far away I bear my heart's distress
Thinking of her and her beauty
Suffused in dream's sweet melody.

So many days have flitted swiftly by
To bring autumn this deep melancholy.

nhìn hoa cười đón mừng vui duyên
nàng:
tình thơ ngây từ đây nát tan

Hoa ơi ! Thôi ngưng cười đùa lá loi.
Cùng tôi buồn đắm đuối vui chi tình,
đầy bao ngày thắm:
dây xéo tâm hồn này lệ sầu hoen ý thu.

Ai có về bên bến sông Tương,
nhấn người duyên dáng tôi thương,
sao đành nở dứt tơ vương.
Ôi duyên hò từ nay bơ vơ.
Dây tình tôi nắn cung tơ,
rút lòng sầu trách người mơ.

Thông Đạt
1949

With her new love she lives in ecstasy,
Rending my heart and leaving it to cry.
While flowers greet her happiness gaily,
They shatter this chaste love without
mercy.

O Flower! Stop your flirty smile.
Join me in grief and kill your joy.
For now and for a good long while
This pain crushes my heart in tears.

You who travel back to Tuong river
shore,
Please tell the graceful girl whom I
adore,
Why did she break our bonds of love?
O love! from now I'll live a lonesome
life.
I make music with strings that bind our
hearts
And blame my pain on her, the
heartbreaker.

Translated by Thomas D. Le
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