



SANTACRUZ 2012 HOANG HUNG

INNOVENT
TRANS MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

ELLEN BASS

HOANG HUNG



POETRY & MEMOIRS 2012

Leading Vietnamese poet, Hoang Hung, made his name among the generation of anti-America war poets in the 1960's and became one of the key figures of the poetry renovation after the war. He has written many books, including *Nightmares*, a collection about his time in prison that was refused by publishers and eventually published online. His poems have been translated and published in literary magazines and anthologies internationally. Hoang Hung is also known for his translations of modern and contemporary poets including Apollinaire, Federico Garcia Lorca, Boris Pasternak, and Allen Ginsberg. As a journalist, he has worked for free speech and press. Hoang Hung has won literary awards in Vietnam and fellowships from France and the US. He now lives in Ho Chi Minh City.

HOANG HUNG
POETRY & MEMOIR

How My “Nightmares” Were Created

Until now, when several of my poems have been translated and published in France and in the USA, when I have got the right to go out of Vietnam reading my poems, memories of those bad days still haunted my hours in the form of sweating nightmares. In fact, thirty nine months in jails and a “re-education camp” (August 1982 – October 1985) * were unbearable if there was no Poetry in this world. Yes, Poetry was my Guardian Angel in that “Season of Hell”.

In the cell, without pen and paper, I had written down diaries in my mind, diaries in the form of verse lines. Several short poems had been created completely in a flashing time, later I called them “fulguration poems”. Others were only drafts that would be finished some years after I was released. I had been back home a short time before the realization of the “doi moi” (change and make it new) policy of the Vietnamese authorities.

In a new situation, I had a chance to publish some of those poems in my two poetry books “Sea Horse” (1988) and “The Man Searching His Own Face” (1994). They were warmly welcome by readers and the literature milieu, but brought a lot of trouble to myself as well as to my publisher, and the authorities henceforth paid a sharp vigilance to prevent the publication of the rest of my poetry.

In 2002, to commemorate my 60th birthday, my 40 years of devoting to Poetry and the 20th anniversary of my imprisonment, I selected 108 poems of mine (the number 108 is meaningful to Vietnamese: it is the number of the major stars that show the

fate of every human being, the number of the most worshipped Buddhas as well as of the rebels-heroes in a novel that is very popular to Chinese and Vietnamese). I submitted them to two publishers at the same time. Both refused to publish them, it is mainly due to "Nightmares" - 30 prison poems included.

The French poet Paul Eluard wrote: "Any poem is poem of circumstance". It is truly my case.

HOANG HUNG

* The cause of my imprisonment can be found in my essay entitled "The Modernization of Vietnamese Poetry: A History from a Poet's Perspective" that was published in *New American Writing* No 22 (2004)

Contents

Entering	15
Blank Night	16
Calling Out	17
The Last Day of the Year's Evening	18
Untitled 1	19
Untitled 2	19
At Noon	20
Thach Thung (White Lizards)	21
Midnight	22
The Death	23
The Indian Almond Leaf	24
Dispirited	25
An Ordinary Day	26
Questioning the Stone House	28
In a Wink	28
Crossing a Mountain Pass at Night	29
The Man Who Came Back	30
A Man Returning Home	31
The Smell of Rain or A Poem Belonging to M.	32
The Smell of Rain or A Poem Belonging to M.	33
Children and the Shower	36
Untitled 3	37

The Root of the Wind	38
Untitled 4	38
Untitled 5	40
The Gentle Madman	41
A Peaceful Madman	42
The Mad Woman	43
Awakened in Hongai	44
Waking in Hongai	44
The Man Who is Looking for His Own Face	45
Untitled Poem	47
City Street 1	47
Untitled 6	48
Untitled 7	48
Stone Dog	49
A Dog of Stone	50
Black Dog And the Night	51
Black Dog, Black Night	52
Tourist Night	53
A Rainy Night	54
Fever	55
America (Excerpt)	56
A Poet Friend	57
The River Mouth	59

The Snowy Mountains	60
Beside the Pagoda	60
A Plant in My Room	61
Sunset	61
The Dry Season	61
Listening	62
Awakening on the Himalaya	63
Wildflowers	63
Master	64

Nightmares & Other Poems

By Hoang Hung

**Translations by Hoang Hung, Joseph Duemer,
Nguyen Do, Paul Hoover, Duong Tuong,
Linh Dinh, The Hung, and Ellen Bass**

ENTERING

The tar-blackened door
Slams behind me
A tumultuous blustering noise bursts out
Like a cauldron of boiling oil.
Hairless heads
Rise up and lean toward me following my steps
Black skeletons
Give off the smell of corpses
Ah! Here is the Hell itself
And I begin to live my devil existence.
How easy!
It takes only one minute even one second
Of trespassing this doorstep
To be far away from human life

– Take off all your clothes!
The shouting makes me jump.

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

BLANK NIGHT

The murderer with savage white eyes
is singing a plaintive *vong co*^{*} song.
With trembling hands
The fraudulent doctor picks up every stale rice grain
The thief kid at Hang Co railway station^{**}
Strangles the rapist of children, making choking sounds
Three opium traffickers
Sit down to watch the former Party secretary dance

Go into the restroom
To watch
The wedding of the lame one with the man with a crooked leg
Come in to see
Two robbers
Catching each other's lice

Horrifying night
Where am I now?
Not a wink of sleep all night I wait for the dawn

The cement floor is paved with scabies scales

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

^{*} A traditional folk music air

^{**} Central railway station in Hanoi

CALLING OUT

I call out in the heart of the night. Call the traffic noise outside
call the wind call all kind of scents call the two-meter long spread
wings of a wandering bird beaten repeatedly smartly by the
wind under a collapsing sky. I call out in the heart of the night.
Ragged hair tense forehead I call out. Aha! Jumping grinding
teeth masturbating blowing out the hundred-watt lamp. Close
your eyes and dream away! A piece of courtyard the sound of a
woman pouring down water and a green onion bulb. That's all.
No no no I've had quite enough of it! Enough of being called in
the roll enough of catching lice enough of mouthing my prisoner
number. At midnight I call out and the grave resounds. Freedom!
Where are you?

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR'S EVENING

Twilight invades my soul, gloominess overwhelms the grave's interior. All around me steel teeth, stone teeth. I am declining, tottering. Ah! So heavy the ceiling, so thick the wall. What else? Lice are biting, mosquitoes are flying, the lizard thrusts out its tongue. Birds don't alight on the barbed wire net, leaving me here hopelessly investigating the height of the sky. I throw my head against the steel door I shove my feet into the cement floor I am here for a century to eat to piss to shit to lie to sit on a winter evening that sticks in the sky making choking sounds. Ah! My hand is completely smashed by its own fortune lines!

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

UNTITLED 1

In a hamlet of cells with tenebrous and impenetrable human faces, I sputter my calls and cries, I scratch the wall of immense night to look thoroughly at the guts of humanity, finding them pitch-black. On my knees I burst out crying but my eyes are all dried up.

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

UNTITLED 2

Oh the love of my dream, you were lying nude in a dark corner
How high was the tower, and fastically blue the distant moon!
The seashore was writhing, the female dancer whirling.
You didn't say a word, just locked the deserted house from the
inside and hand in hand towards the infinite we were making
During a solar eclipse, sevens suns were rotating
No refuge was to be found, since over the fields the wind was
rising!

Trans. by The Hung

AT NOON

After an earthquake from far

The clouds are flying to assemble over my large blazing breast,
making me very thirsty

Trees and rocks are falling, walls on four sides staggering and
sinking

Who is calling me from so far away?

– Wait for me! Wait for me! I am going to explode!

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

THACH THUNG (WHITE LIZARDS)

I watch a couple of *thach- thungs* on the cell's ceiling, near the warming lamp that turns them white-pink, almost transparent. They can't know they are inside a jail. They don't care at all for a man who lies day and night on his back to watch them naked, loving each other. They can't know that tonight is a winter cutting night. White-pink, almost transparent, they silently love each other beside the lamp that radiates with the warmth of spring. The jail's lamp.

As if humans could be nude in no shame. As if humans could love each other under the sun without feeling. Like *thach- thungs*. Maybe jails don't exist at all. Is that true, *thach thung*?

– *Thak. Thoong*

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

(Published in *Hayden's Ferry Review* Spring 2006, Tempe, USA)

Onomatopoea

MIDNIGHT

Every midnight I am startled awake
By a harsh voice that sings
Always just one line:
– *My God, please save me!*

Does it spurt from the earth's womb?
Does it pour from the sky?
Passing through seven walls
Which world does it come from?

Everyone is startled awake
Then lie down one at a time
Some continue to snore
Some are tossing about
Some are weeping softly

I still sit here, my arms clasping my knees
The singing echoes from my breast to my feet
From my feet to my head
Resounding dully within my hair.
One line only:
– *My God, please save me!*

Just one line
At midnight
When the earth turns over in the middle of the pitch-dark sky

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

THE DEATH

Lice have abandoned you

You died last night

Mouth whitened by toothpaste

Oh man, you were constantly warned:

Do not eat toothpaste even when starving to death

On your five foot six inch body

There were only fetid rags left

Well! Done anyway!

Finish all your old scores

Let the flies come in now

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

(Published in *Hayden's Ferry Review* Spring 2006, Tempe, USA)

THE INDIAN ALMOND LEAF

Somber eyes were silently
Watching through a crack in the door
When will the last Indian almond leaf fall?

– It will fall this night
When the north-east wind rises
– No. It will keep hanging on the tree
As long as our damned existence on earth

In our bloody nightmare
The Indian almond leaf was lying there immensely
But when we woke up it existed no more
Under a black and blue sky

Suddenly I feel creepy and exhausted
As if my last drop of blood had just drained away

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

DISPIRITED

As if I had just one dissatisfaction left:

Being unable to analyze the smell of the musty and endless
corridor

As if I had just this adventure left:

Looking over the barbed-wired roof

As if I had just this game left:

Recalling bizarre patched-up nightmares

As if I had just this wish left:

To see the face of the person who speaks next-door

As if I had just this wish left:

To have no concept of freedom in the next body I take

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

(Published in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, Spring 2006, Tempe, USA)

AN ORDINARY DAY

Two prisoners coupled at T.L.:

In the clanking morning
You bustle about with glass and jar
Then one day next door to you
Hello, my invisible neighbor girl!

And the door opened
The chamber-pot is changed
The door closed
And the door opened
I'm going for interrogation.
During the time of Q & A
Of the I-Spy game
The cat & mouse game
I am haunted by an invisible shadow
And I'm coming back to the cell
Door opened
Door closed
And door opened
Meal arrived
Door closed
We clank bowls to call each other to

Take our prison lunch.

After the noise of dish-washing now comes the quiet, sacred
moment before your bath
Then water gurgles and I imagine you are rubbing yourself
prudently managing to do it softly as you are so shy and my
breath held my body on fire and in turn frozen

A bird flies off saying that you start hanging your clothes to
dry them

Then the door opened.
Time for writing self-declarations.
In the paper-desert
Loiters the haunting invisible shadow
While my letters drag like loaded camels.
And I am coming back to the cell
The door opened
The meal arrived
The door closed
We clank bowls to call each other to
Take our prison dinner

Then comes the suspense of waiting for darkness
It's the hour of holy communion it's our hour
Let me knock first, cack cack, and you cack cack, I cack cack cak
you cack cack cack I cack cack/cack cack cack you cack cack/cack
cack cack then I rub saat saat you saat saat I saat saat saat you saat
saat saat wordless signs twitter hurriedly accelerating intertwining
The wall burns up
The night burns up
Night fragments fall down
Scattering
Crumbling

The cry at midnight
Is your identity mark

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

(Published in *Hayden's Ferry Review* Spring 2006, Tempe, USA)

The Central Interrogation Center

QUESTIONING THE STONE HOUSE

Swallowing so many moans and cries
Why are you so mute?

Absorbing so many panting breaths
Why are you so icy?

Containing so many lives
Why are you so hard?

Brooding so much on hope
Why do you look so gloomy?

This sphinx of the XXth Century
Never gives an answer

(Published in *Hayden's Ferry Review* Spring 2006, Tempe, USA)

IN A WINK

A square of wall a whole world
A moment of sleep a whole life

Trans by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

(Published in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, Spring 2006, Tempe, USA)

CROSSING A MOUNTAIN PASS AT NIGHT

I close my eyes so that darkness is absolute
Crossing the mountain pass, the van's voice grows hoarse
The sound of prayer and a wooden bell is entangled with the
smell of incense and smoke
A coffin travels high and riskily
My God! The way lost is in the fog
I don't know where my soul is straying
Only lamplight for a guide
The one you light every night for a séance of prayer

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

THE NIGHT OF CROSSING THE PASS

I close my eyes to complete the darkness.
The voice of the bus rages as it crawls over the pass.
With the sound of a wooden fish and the smell of sticks,
the coffin runs precariously.
My God, it's foggy—all direction is lost.
Where does the spirit go,
leaving a light in eternity
where every night you have prayed?

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *Parthenon West*, San Francisco No 3, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008. A French version of this poem published in Europe, Paris, No 875, Avril 2002)

THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

He came back from that far country
to find his wife in tears all night and his children bewildered all day

He came back from that far country
to see his friends turn pale at his apparition

He came back from that far country
And in the crowded street he feels shivers at the back of his neck

After a year he will still choke in the midst of a party
After two years he still wakes in a sweat from nightmares
After three years a white lizard remains in his memory
After ten years he continues the habit of sitting alone in darkness

A day comes when he is tired of their staring
A night comes when a soft voice will question him

A tap on the shoulder
Startles him

Trans. by Hoang Hung & Joseph Duemer

(Published in *Seattle Review* No1, 2002; in *Poetry International V*, San Diego 2002; in *New American Writing*, Cali, No 22, 2004. A French version of this poem published in Europe, Paris, No 875, Avril 2002)

A MAN RETURNING HOME

He is home from *That*
His wife cries all night, his kids are confused all day
Home from *That*
when he walks through the door, his friends' faces are ashen
Home from *That*
he feels an itch on the back of his head
in the midst of a crowd
as if someone is watching

One year later, he suddenly chokes during a party
Two years later, he still sweats from his nightmares
Three years later, he still feels pity for a lizard
Years later, he still has the habit of sitting alone in darkness

Some days, he feels a stranger's penetrating stare
Some nights, an aimless voice asks questions
He jumps
at a touch to his shoulder

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *New American Writing*, Cali, No 23, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

SMELL OF RAIN OR THE POEM OF M.

All the tears of the world that surround our house.
You lie against me and because the rain is falling
Like nothing we have ever seen, you tell me the sad stories
You have buried in your heart for years:

*It rained for thousands of nights turning the darkness white.
Like the cow remembering dung I went crazy remembering your
smell,
Which you lost lying on anonymous tile floors
leaving me only nights of rain and the odor of tears.*

Do you still love me? How far does your love go?
How far resentment and anger?
Fifteen years are hardly enough to understand our hearts.

The constant rain has flooded the ground floor.
Upstairs we lie under the eaves listening to rain beating on the
metal roof.
May death come while we lie here together listening to this rain.

Night of 6/25/92

Trans. by Hoang Hung & Joseph Duemer

(Published in *Poetry International*, San Diego, No V 2002 ; in *Gravity*, Chicago 2003. A French version of this poem published in Europe, Paris, No 875, *Avril* 2002)

THE SMELL OF RAIN OR A POEM BELONGING TO M.

A tear from all of humankind surrounds our house.
Lying down beside me, you tell a sad story
That lies deep in your heart, only now disclosed
like a suggestion from this amazing rain that has never been seen.

For thousands of nights, rain makes the darkness white.
You passionately miss my scent as a cow misses its excrement
and the garbage,
but I lost my scent from lying on strange floors.
All that remains is the smell of the rain, like the smell of fear at night.

Do you still love me, and how long will it last?
If you get angry and hate me, how long will last?
For fifteen years, we haven't completely understood our own hearts.

Rain overflows the first floor.
We climb to the top floor to listen to the rain
Pouring ironically on the roof
and wish, while listening, that we might die.

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in Parthenon West, SF No3, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

OTHER POEMS BY HOANG HUNG

CHILDREN AND THE SHOWER

To Van Cao, composer and poet

Instantly the pavement is cleaned by rainwater
And occupied by children.
The children rush out from houses and alleys.
Like another shower
They freshen the streets.

Nude, greasedly black
They run, jump, roll and crawl.

No more shade of any grown-up.
No more trace of dusty wheels and jostled steps.

Let water pour down from the sky and wash your wild hairs,
Let your screams and the shower sound make drums and bells.

The shower ends suddenly, as it came,
And the children vanish
Rendering the pavement to jostling, busy people.
And now in some discrete corners
Their tiny bodies are silently evaporating.

1969

Trans. by Hoang Hung

UNTITLED 3

Today the street is in winter,
Why is your skirt summer?

The waves of blue stripes are swirling
As you carry the full sea on your breast

The sea was very beautiful in summer,
I was crazy looking for it one day.

But the summer has gone
There is no trace of sunlight at the horizon,

Why do you still wear the thin skirt
When we have no more summer?

Why do you make me suffer
Remembering the summer flame that was extinguished?

Off-shore the sea is grey, I guess.
The cold makes large waves shrink.

Your breast is so high that it makes me choke.
Please burrow it under a thick coat.

Today the street is in winter,
Please let the summer lay down in peace.

1970

Trans. by Hoang Hung

THE ROOT OF THE WIND

At the farthest high sea
There is a tree with thousands of leaves.
Thousands of leaves are rustling thousands of greens.
Thousands of leaves are rustling in the root of the wind.
At the farthest high sea
The wind breaks the horizon
And the tempest of waves rushes in

1973

Trans. by Hoang Hung

UNTITLED 4

Where do the stairs lead us up to?
The *bim* is purple; part of the brick wall shows through the stucco.
Where do the stairs lead us up to?
The coffee's smoke and a run-down shop.

The house fell down long ago,
leaving only its stairs,
regretting the footsteps that had stepped up
and up.

Going up to catch trails of white smoke,
Going up to catch flocks of wild birds,
catching bewitchment, catching dizziness,

catching the rustling sound of the city's life.
The house fell down long ago,
leaving only its stairs.

Where do the stairs lead us up to?
The foggy sky has no wings in flight.
The stairs suddenly come to a stop; the only way is back.

From the center of the street, a lonely kid is looking up.

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

Bim is a Vietnamese flower.

(Published in *Parthenon West*, SF No3, 2005; in *Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

UNTITLED 5

The faint, dark hallways where you can only step by touching.
The roads on which *co may* stitch themselves to your pant legs.
The distances of water echoing the sound of the screw-propeller
The H'mong sky in which the leaves sing their nightly love songs.

Excited and anxious, your body is like a dancing flame.
Gently and silently, you're a small town girl with whispering eyesight.
You appear quickly, in sunlight from the sea, as the factory
whistles a change of shift.

You are thirsty for love, your chest thin and eyelids dark blue.
Why do you rouge your lips too soon for your age?
Why do you look like the sun at sunset?
Why is your skin so sweaty and pale?
Your chest completely exhibits a lonely space.

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

Co may is a grass that grows in Vietnam

(Published in "*Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry*" –
Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

THE GENTLE MADMAN

He keeps walking right in the street, determinedly
An ageless face
Body beyond weather
His eyes: opened windows of an empty room

He keeps walking at a steady pace
Each step forgotten as soon as it's taken
He doesn't know where his next step goes.

He keeps walking, counting his steps on his fingertips
Never exceeding One

As children, we used to run giggling after him
As we grew up
The sight of him extinguished the flames of our joy

In the long run, he became familiar
One day, I found myself amidst the crowd, mumbling.

Hai Phong, 1960s

Trans. by Duong Tuong

(Published in *Poetry International*, San Diego, No V, 2002. A French version of this poem has been published in Europe, Paris, No 875, *Avril* 2002)

A PEACEFUL MADMAN

As he walks on the road
he stares with an ageless face
and unweathered body
Two eyes open two empty rooms

For a thousand steps he walks the same way
forgetting each step as he takes it
losing it behind him
He doesn't know where to take his next step

He walks and counts his steps on his fingers
counting to only one

In childhood we followed him laughing
As we grew
the sight of his shadow would interrupt our fun
but encouraged us in despair
Then he became more familiar
One day I happened to see myself
grumbling in a crowd

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in Parthenon West, SF No3, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

THE MADWOMAN

Carrying a broken brick on her head
she walks and sings
Evening comes gradually at the end of the street

She walks and sings
Fragments of a tranquil song
break in my heart

Alas, the madness of tile and brick
Please sing and sing again
of all the destruction
you carry in your head

Hai Phong, during the war

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *New American Writing*, Cali No23, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry – Milweed Editions*, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008. A French version of this poem has been published in *Europe*, Paris, No 875, *Avril* 2002)

AWAKENED IN HONGAI

Suddenly awake. What night time is now
Suffocating. Waves are sleepy and lazy
The mountain peak hangs right over my head
And unhealthy white is the tiring color of the cloud
Suddenly standing up. Anxious suspenseful and frightened
Light, oh light !
Soon the collapsing

1969

Trans. by Pham Toan-Hoang Hung

(Published in *New American Writing*, Cali, No 22, 2004)

WAKING IN HONGAI

I suddenly wake at night, what time is it?
It's so sultry. Waves have no measure,
and the mountain leans too closely to my head.
Clouds like faces are pale and exhausted.
Frightened and nervous, I leap to my feet.
Hurry, dawn, bring the shining morning
before the rock comes down!.

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Publised in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* –
Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

THE MAN WHO IS LOOKING FOR HIS OWN FACE

The night is falling
I take up furtively
To look for my face

Look for my face look for my face look for my face

The face of the railway station by night
Mouth opened sleepers
Startled to wake
Terrified eyes
People from all directions are hustling to replace each other.
Where do you go do you go with me
Do you have a face?
We look at one another as at a mirror.
The night all around us is growing small because of the jostling crowd
You enjoy furtively my passionate caress
I know in the morning your face would return to stone-deafness
Enduring insults to earn a living.
The train whistles, what does it look for?
Look for its face look for its face look for its face

My face is in the wind blowing off
My face is in the sun burning up
My face is in the poisoning leaf
My face is in the lonely echo of the whistle
My face is in the hands incubating
My face is in the silent mountain rock
My face I look for my face I look for my face I look for

Set fire to the torch

For me to go to look for
Set fire to the torch of vagabondage
For the dusty feet
Set fire to the torch of speed
Burning the wheels
Set fire to the torch of love with passionate or indifferent kisses
Set fire to the torch of rhythm
Clanking the world with dissonant sounds
Set fire to the torch of colors
Squirming Van Gogh's sun
Set fire to the torch of words
O poetry, help me to look for my face!

I look for my face I look for my face I look for my face
I am hungry for a human face I am thirsty of my own face
I long for your face where is your face?

All but desert
All but nonchalance
All is passing
Upon the glass of the wagon's window
Go
Train
Wind and sand running after to make drawings on my face
Go, go
Inlay your face in the night
Far far away

1973

Trans. by Hoang Hung, revised by Paul Hoover

UNTITLED POEM

For Hoàng Cam

Rain makes dreams
A barrel full of the bad old days
I'm leaving
Wind, oh the wind!

A silent wall
A slit
Hair

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* –
Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

CITY STREET 1

Mad storm. Umbrella tornado. Blue lid. Screaming glass. Sidewalk
skirt. Junk amenities. Piled ogled. Cross lips. Soul-less. A split
second. Mini hair ass vague. Take pants off, curse. A roasted chicken
a roasted chicken.

Mad storm. Yellow dance. Trashed. Conked out.

Mad storm. Flowing mob. Water gagged. Hair tossed. Forever
darkened earth. Find, die, go.

Mad storm. Yanking hand away. Brain pang. Wide eyed inmate
returns to wrong century. Dripping dew wets eternally skinny form.

1980

Trans. by Linh Dinh

(Published in *Filling Station*, Canada, 2001; in *Seattle Review*, USA No1, 2002)

UNTITLED 6

Going with mad hair that bursts out, pitch black hair that waves,
under the flamed sky that is changing when the evening is
darkened by the tornado. Going with ten fingers that are twisting
to open the night, eyes drinking, trousers flying, heels swaying,
ears smoking, she is laughing at nobody.

1980

Trans. by Hoàng Hưng

UNTITLED 7

Hush! Listen! I am totally lost in a dreamlike vision. The sorrow
tears cigarettes apart. Fingers, hair, eyes, bottom of the cup,
clock's hands, night, sea-storms, pirates, a beauty mark. Who was
singing in the other world? A male? Or a female? The city hung
upside down. Black, ice, black, ice, black, ice... Set free? Drowned?

1981

Trans. The Hung – Hoàng Hưng

STONE DOG

I have come back to my village to meet you
Stone dog

The stone dog sits with the river swirling around him
When will the stone dog cross the river?

The stone dog has worn out his eyes
Sadness has worn away the stone dog's face—

He is returning to an existence of stone
Set up a mountain in the fields

When the beggar boy reaches to pet the stone dog
The stone dog bursts out laughing and collapses as baked lime

1992

Trans. by Joseph Duemer & Hoang Hung

(Published in *Poetry International*, San Diego, No V, 2002. A French version of this poem published in Europe, Paris, No 875, Avril 2002)

A DOG OF STONE

Arriving at a village
I see a dog of stone

The stone dog sits in the river's stream incessantly
When will it cross over?

The stone dog wears out its eyes
The stone dog loses its face under cover of sadness

Returning to a previous life of stone
it stands like a small hill in the middle of a field

A boy raises his hand to ask it something
The stone dog laughs as it turns to powdered lime

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *Parthenon West*, SF, No3, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

THE BLACK DOG AND THE NIGHT

For Nguyen Do

1.
The dog
A black dog
Rushes into the darkness
And the night snarls, growing warm.
2.
The black dog barks at the blood-colored flower.
3.
The black dog turns her face upward, looking at the moon.
4.
The black dog hisses incomprehensible syllables—
Who are you, wandering spirit in the night?
5.
How sad, mongrel!
Everybody has forsaken me—
Sniffing, lean your mouth on my lips.
6.
The black dog throws herself about all night long
The itch of previous lives
Driving her crazy, deprived of speech.

1992

Trans. by Duong Tuong

(Published in *Poetry International*, San Diego, No V, 2002)

BLACK DOG, BLACK NIGHT

1

A dog
The black dog
The black dog runs into the night
warms the night with his snarling

2

The black dog barks at a blood-red jasmine

3

The black dog faces up, looking at the moon

4

The black dog hisses in a complex code
Whose spirit is moving in the darkness tonight?

5

Oh, I am so sad
Everyone forsakes me
Sniffing , he lays his mouth on my lips

6

The black dog passionately searches all night long
An itch from his previous life
drives him crazy because he has no way to express it

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *New American Writing*, Cali, No23, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

TOURIST NIGHT

The sheet is soaked with sugary sweat
An old whore in an airless room

Can you get to heaven riding a professional's belly?

The desire to go down
To the deep heart of the night

In a city without moonlight
Echoing karaoke

1992

Trans. by Joseph Duemer

(Published in *Poetry International*, San Diego, No V, 2002)

A RAINY NIGHT

For Thanh Thao

For a long time I haven't had a night like tonight
A random raindrop landing on my shoulder and neck
makes me remember roaming at night from Bac Qua flea market
to Hang Co train station
For one cent of Ruou I was able to fly to heaven
For the first time I secretly sold rice coupons
to buy loneliness on a street
Although thirty, I was still boyish
but became a man with a street prostitute
that nobody else desired

I looked for my fate in every distant place
in every kind of trouble
Being alive became just a habit
Tonight I'm in the South but feel the North's coldness
which makes me want a cup of black coffee
and draws me into the rainy night
on a motorcycle not a bicycle like those days
But I'm already fifty. How can I be with you again, old girl?

At thirty, I was a poet
Now I thirst for the lines of a poem
when this life turns me to stone
Suddenly I'm surprised by a single drop of rain

Ho Chi Minh City 6/6/1993

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *Parthenon West*, SF, No3, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

FEVER

I flow, I swell to fill the space entirely.
I see myself flying up from the ground.
What is this fever that shocks the body, buzzing dizzily in my ears?

Your hands are like a cool creek
when I feel unsafe.

Quiet and distant as you read the sutra, your voice
comes from previous life when we weren't yet devoted.
Your eyes are on the treetop
as you watch the train of life passing.
In this life I'm a clumsy devotee.
Have we had any other life, my dear?

It's shocking when the pillow gets wet
and my hands reach out for you.
The lonely days gnaws its way toward night.
You sit like a mountain, in silent seclusion.
I'm still swaying, impermanent
because of the furious quakes under my skin.
When the fever releases,
I can be quiet, disperse into my words.

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in Parthenon West, SF, No3, 2005; in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* – Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

AMERICA (Excerpt)

For Paul Hoover

The LAX was dark gray
The security man was not as huge as I imagined
My luggage wasn't opened because a custom officer preferred to
ask me about Vietnamese history
Sweaty, looking for the way to another departure gate,
I was surprised to see Japanese plums blooming over the street

The Golden Gate stands up to the sky and turns a shade of red
The poet is peaceful and tall as a redwood tree

Waking in a glass-enclosed room
I lie there watching birds pick seeds from the garden
and a flock of wild ducks swim freely on the pool
I miss so much my childhood which I'll never see again

At night losing our direction in the puzzling darkness of a
mountain road
I suddenly see the Ram moon rising on San Francisco Bay

Where are the skyscrapers with colorful spinning lights and
where is the concrete, steely and ironic
Only nature is forever secret
The deer shadows are stupefied behind branches and leaves
and the redwood forest has fallen and grown silent for
thousands of years

Ram: The 15th night of each month in lunar calendar when the moon is perfectly round and bright

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* –
Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

A POET FRIEND

After four years without a trace
the moment we met it seemed like science fiction
One of us has a sidewalk fate, the other is an escapee from his
home country
Both put their heads together in Heaven
and laugh for a hundred miles as they speed on the freeways

The fiction becomes the truth
because of Poetry

Me listening to you brag
superciliously
and become aggressive
at a party
but
caring
persistent
When just you and me
run half of the earth's circle
you are still you

Four years in the 'new economy' of America
You show your chapped and scarred hands
Never been refused any job that an immigrant has done

How mournful but determined you are
me knowing that only poetry keeps you alive

Three days later
in that speeding car

both of these guys have red faces and pink ears as they argue
about a poem
ready to say goodbye on the spot
Oh, Poetry
What are you, Poetry?

Translated by Nguyen Do and Paul Hoover

(Published in *"Black Dog, Black Night, Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry"* –
Milweed Editions, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2008)

THE RIVER MOUTH

For my wife

A small boat carries us to the mouth of the river.
We sit among the fishermen who don't ask where we are going.
They will take coracles to the deep sea.
As for us, what strange fish will we find?

On a white dune that seems to drift on the sea
there is a market to sell the fish.
At the end of this dune we will return to childhood,
slipping off our packs, tossing them among the splintered
planks.
At the end of this dune we will pass
to another life.

You are smiling, a tear caught in your lashes.
How sad is this life, but how beautiful.
You are smiling, the market is sunlit.
The boat starts its engine, calling us back.

All the fishermen are casting their nets,
their coracles floating in the river mouth.
But we stand on the dune, watching them.
Should we go toward the mystery
or return?

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS

One should wait for clear days
to see the snowy mountains
hundreds of miles away

I had been waiting all season
the sky was always foggy, gloomy;
on the road that leads to the mountains
guns were firing,
cars burnt.

This morning, a pair of cranes fly back,
bringing on their wings
snow from the faraway mountains.

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

BESIDE THE PAGODA

An empty space amidst the green
Once a pine, uprooted by lightning

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

A PLANT IN MY ROOM

Rises toward the sun
on green wings

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

SUNSET

The gate of night
echoing old bricks

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

THE DRY SEASON

Wind chases the sand in the bed of the Niranjana River,
starving dogs run after men who go to relieve themselves.
A woman in a sari bends to a smoky mass of shit from the bony cow.
Once He bid farewell to the cave in the hill
and in this village He found the Way, here under a bodhi-tree.

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

LISTENING

Be silent to hear the snow
melting on the summit of the mountain

To listen to the children singing on the hill path
I think I am on the way home

Listen to the call of a crane
through the fog
I tramp the muddy soil to find it
but catch only a glimpse of white stupa

Hear the sunlight
that breaks on a branch
the wood's voice resounding
like a bell underground

Listen to the forest burgeoning
upon the deer's horns

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

AWAKENING ON THE HIMALAYA

When I opened my eyes, I saw snowy mountains soaring
this dream came true in my life.
From the doorway, I looked toward the horizon
A fantastic black cone glistened
on the peak of the white kingdom

Snow can not cling
to the summit of Samargantha
exposed to the wind.

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

WILD FLOWERS

The slope of delicate blue flowers
stretches out at the foot of the snowy mountain.
The whispering flowers tempt me to lie down

Lie down and close your eyes
forget all the things of the world

never get up again.

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

THE MASTER

For the Ven. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh

The master moves in lightly as a breath
and the zen students are illuminated by Wisdom.
You are peaceful, you are smiling
you are home, you arrive
now and here.
Only this minute, this second to be free.

Co-trans. by Ellen Bass and Hoang Hung

BIOGRAPHY OF HOÀNG HUNG

Hoàng Hung was born in 1942 into one of the notable intellectual families of North Vietnam. His grandfather was the governor of Bac Giang, a large province. His father, Hoàng Thuy Ba, whose medical degree was from Academy of Paris, was one of the first doctors of medicine in Indochina to be trained in the West. Also educated in Paris, his uncle, Hoàng Tich Chu, was one of the founders of Vietnamese journalism.

Hoàng Hung's propensity for poetry was revealed at age ten, when his own poems and those he had translated from French were published in the literature for children's page of a famous newspaper in Hanoi. After finishing high school, he served as a teacher in the impoverished northwest highlands of Vietnam. Two years later, he was admitted as a student to the Literature Department of Hanoi Teacher's College and won an important poetry prize sponsored by *Van Nghe* (Literature & Arts), the country's most prestigious literary magazine. In 1970, when he was a high school teacher, his first poetry collection was published, the two-author volume *Dat Nang* (The Sunlit Land). The poems of patriotic romanticism were loved by young people, and he became one of the most valued poets of the "anti-American-War" generation.

After the failure of the North Vietnam army in the *Tet Mau Than* general assault of 1969, Hoàng Hung experienced dramatic disillusionment with the Communist Party's leadership and what

he had come to see as the false “socialist ideal” it was promoting. At the same time, he was eager to study modernist literature and art. As a result, he stopped writing poems for publication and began to create an individualistic, dissident poetry that he kept out of the public eye.

In 1973, Hoàng Hung left teaching for a career in journalism. After the reunification of the country in 1975, he moved to Saigon. There he became increasingly influenced by modern literature of the West, especially American literature, which had been imported in great quantity during the U. S. occupation. It was at this time that he entered into a major renewal of his poetics.

In August, 1982, Hoàng Hung was arrested by the Hanoi police for possession of a Hoàng Cam poetry manuscript that the famous dissident poet had given him. As a result of this and the discovery of his own dissident poetry in his Saigon home, he was accused of “reactionary” activities and imprisoned for 39 months without trial. It was a very hard time for his family. His wife, who was unemployed at that time, had to move heaven and earth to provide food for her two little children, her mother-in-law, and herself.

In November, 1985, shortly before the institution of “Renewal Policies” by the Vietnam Communist Party, Hoàng Hung was released from prison. He returned to Saigon, renamed as Ho Chi Minh City, and, with the English language he had acquired in prison with the use of a dictionary and copies of *Moscow News*, began to make a living by translating works of literature and journalism. His first published translation was *The Jungle Book*

by Rudyard Kipling. In 1988, he regained his job as a journalist. After working briefly for a variety of magazines, he became one of the founders of the weekly *Lao Dong Chu Nhat* (*Sunday Labor*) newspaper which soon became popular for its radical spirit. He was also editor and chief of the Culture Department of the daily newspaper *Lao Dong* (*Labor News*) that developed out of *Lao Dong Chu Nhat*.

Thanks to the open-mindedness of the “Renewal Policies” in their first phase, in 1988 and 1994 Hoàng Hưng was allowed to publish two books, *Ngua Bien* (Sea Horse) and *Nguoi Di Tim Mat* (The Man In Search of His Face). Both volumes contained old and new works. He also published essays on the modernization of Vietnamese poetry. The poems and essays were harshly criticized by the official press, but welcomed by young poets. Hoàng Hưng became a symbol of the spirit of renewal in Vietnamese poetry. Nevertheless, his poetry so vexed cultural officials that he soon resigned his editorial post at *Lao Dong* in order to insure his poetry’s freedom of expression.

In 2006, even though his book of poetry, *Hanh Trinh* (My Journey), won the prestigious Poetry Award given by the Hanoi Writer’s Association, his poems of imprisonment, *Ac Mong* (Nightmares), could be published only on the Internet after being refused three times by the official publishing houses of Vietnam. Based in Berlin, *Talawas.org*, a famous website of Vietnamese intellectuals, was the first to publish *Ac Mong* in its entirety. Immediately thereafter, it appeared on Vietnamese language websites all over the world.

In 2007, one of his poems, *Nguoi Ve* ("A Man Returning Home"), was selected for inclusion in the anthology, *100 Great Vietnamese Poems of the XXth Century* (Hanoi: Education Publishing House)

Several of his poems have been published in translation in France (*Europe* magazine), the United States (*Poetry International*, *Seattle Review*, *New American Writing*, *Parthenon West*, and *Hayden Ferry Review*), and in other countries. Fifteen of his poems have been included in the anthology *Black Dog, Black Night: Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry*, published by Milkweed Editions of St. Paul, Minnesota, in January, 2008. The anthology's title is taken from a Hoàng Hưng poem. Two of his poems included in the anthology of world literature LitFinder by Macmillan Reference USA™ that is to be published soon.

In addition to writing his own poems, Hoàng Hưng has translated many works of modern poetry from other languages into Vietnamese. Authors translated include Arthur Rimbaud, Guillaume Apollinaire (France), Federico García Lorca (Spain), Boris Pasternak (Russia), Wallace Stevens, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, Charles Simic and Louise Glück (USA), Margaret Atwood (Canada), Harry Martinson, Nelly Sachs (Sweden). He has been widely recognized as a poetry translator of significance. He is also known for acquainting Vietnamese readers with international developments in modern and post-modern poetry. In 1987, he won the Translation Award from the Vietnam Writer's Association for his book *Poems by Apollinaire*. In 2006 he won the Poetry Award from the Hanoi Writer's Association. He received grants from France's Ministry of Culture & Communication that provided him with translation residencies in Paris in 2000, 2009;

a grant from Poetry Foundation USA in 2005 for reading poetry in San Francisco; a grant from OMI and Ford Foundation in 2008 for a translation residency in New York. He had published books of translation with funds from the French Embassy (*Poems by Apollinaire, Les Choses* by Georges Perec, *Poems* by Andre Velter) and the U. S. Embassy (*15 American Poets of the XXth Century*). Presently he is working on the translation of the modern epic *Aniara* by Harry Martinson that is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of Sweden.

He has been invited by Vietnamese and international cultural institutions to read his poems and to lecture on poetry & translation; they include Hanoi Teachers College, Hanoi Cultural College, Goethe Institute in Hanoi, the British Council in Hanoi, l'Espace (French Cultural Center in Hanoi), Paris 7 University in Paris, House of World Culture and Volsbuhne in Berlin, University of Washington in Seattle, Columbia College Chicago, San Francisco State University, UCLA, University of California Berkeley, the Pen International Asia-Pacific Conference, OMI International Writing Residency (New York).

Retired since 2002 from his career as a journalist, Hoàng Hung works as a free-lance writer, an advisor to the editor-in-chief of *Nguoi Do Thi* (The Urban) magazine in Hanoi, an important contributor to prestigious Vietnamese independent websites *Talawas.org* (Berlin-based) and *Bauxite Vietnam* (Hanoi-based) that challenge the totalitarian regime. His writing focuses on innovative poetics on the one hand and on the other with freedom of expression and of the press in Vietnam.

Hoàng Hưng now lives in Ho Chi Minh City with his wife Nguyen Thi Muoi, a brave heart, who sacrifices her whole life for supporting her man and taking care of her two children. She has a contribution to the success of her daughter Hoàng Ly, a well-known poet and contemporary visual artist.

Email: ndtm42@gmail.com

Tel: 084.919941390

HOANG HUNG - POETRY & MEMOIR

Cover's painting: Trinh Cung
Design : INNOVENT

Published by INTERNATIONAL POETRY LIBRARY SF, INNOVENT, ELLEN BASS...
SF USA March 2012

HHEBOOKS 2012

Trình bày: HOT Design

date

3/21/12

location

RESOURCE CENTER FOR
NON-VIOLENCE
617 OCEAN STREET SANTA CRUZ

time

7PM

\$5-10 SUGGESTED DONATION
\$25-40 READING & RECEPTION
FOR MORE INFO SCAN THE QR CODECONTACT: KIM MAHLER
KIM.MAHLER@PLSF.ORG
TEL: 808.580.1828

ECHOES OF VIETNAM:



HOANG HUNG

Leading Vietnamese poet, Hoang Hung, made his name among the generation of anti-America war poets in the 1960's and became one of the key figures of the poetry renaissance after the war. He has written many books, including Nightmares, a collection about his time in prison that was refused by publishers and eventually published online. His poems have been translated and published in literary magazines and anthologies internationally. Hoang Hung is also known for his translations of modern and contemporary poets including Apollinaire, Federico Garcia Lorca, Boris Pasternak, and Allen Ginsberg. As a journalist, he has worked for free speech and press. Hoang Hung has won literary awards in Vietnam and fellowships from France and the US. He now lives in Ho Chi Minh City.

POETRY &
MEMOIRS7PM
RESOURCE CENTER
FOR NON-VIOLENCE
3/21/12

ANDREW PHAM

Andrew Pham is the author of *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam* (1999) and *The Eaves of Heaven: A Life in Three Wars* (2009). He is also the translator of *Last Night I dreamed of Peace* (2008). *Catfish and Mandala* won the 1999 Kiriama Pacific Rim Book Prize, QPB Nonfiction Prize, and the Oregon Literature Prize. It was also a Guardian Shortlist Finalist, a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, a Barnes & Noble Discovery Book, a Border's Original Voices Selection, *The Eaves of Heaven* was a National Book Critic Circle Finalist and a Asian Pacific American Librarian Association Honorary Book of the Year. It was also the Honor Book of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association and named as One of the Ten Best Books of the Year by Washington Post Book World, One of the Ten Best Books of the Year by Portland Oregonian, and One of the Los Angeles Times' Favorite Books of the Year, One of the Best Books of the Year, Bookmarks Magazine. Andrew X. Pham also won a Writing Writer Award, a Montalvo-Lucas Fellowship, and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship.

ELLEN BASS

Ellen Bass's poetry books include *The Human Line*, named a Notable Book of 2007 by the San Francisco Chronicle and *Mules of Love*, which won the Lambda Literary Award. In 1973 she co-edited the first major anthology of poetry by women, *No More Masks!* and co-authored *The Courage to Heal* which has been translated into 12 languages. Among her awards for poetry are a Pushcart Prize, New Letters Prize, Larry Lewis Prize from Missouri Review, and the Pablo Neruda Prize. She teaches in the MFA program at Pacific University.

& MORE.....

Resources Center
For Non ViolenceInternational
Poetry Library
San FranciscoAnnual events appear in
International Poetry Library

PRESENTED BY



COMMENTS ON HOANG HUNG'S POEMS

...They (your poems) are all...individualistic

Allen Ginsberg (Academy of Literature and Arts of America)

Hand-written letter to Hoang Hung, Feb 18th 1997

Reading the translations of your own work, I am very moved by the insistent feelings of displacement and loss -- it must be our whole world has come to that same bitterplace

Robert Creeley (Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets 1999)

Message emailed to Hoang Hung, 1997, July 12th

“Hung's poems remind me of existential fictions. They happen strongly in time but there is also a timeless quality to them. Many years are compacted within a single lyric poem of loss and suffering. The man who suffers has body and experiences, but he is, in another sense, a representative figure. I'm thinking of the novel *The Women in the Dunes* by the Japanese author Kobe Abe, in which a man slides down a cliff of sand one day while walking in a fog in a distant place. He now becomes the husband of one of many women of the dunes, whose job is eternally to sift the sands. In effect, he has found his own inexorable fate, from which no escape is possible (and finally perhaps not desirable). We are given painful worlds to live in. The heart's emergence is possible, despite having been buried for years ("Smell of rain"); a touch on the shoulder may suddenly awaken us to the life that has been staring past us.

I know of no other poetry with which to compare Hung's. Under its cool, narrative surface, the poetry is very complex and emotional. Perhaps on the autobiographical level, Hung has felt exiled in his own country and removed from the circumstances of his own life and work”

Paul Hoover (Poet in residence, Columbia College Chicago – Editor in Chief of *New American Writing*)

Letter to Prof. Tom Nawrocki, English Department, CCC, Jan 2003

Ce que j'aime, dans les textes de Hoang Hung, c'est qu'il restitue le réel objectif, extérieur, à travers le prisme de l'esprit, du réel intérieur, subjectif, onirique et sensible. Il y a donc dans ses poèmes des notations précises sur les objets, les lieux ou les événements mais elles nous sont transmises amplifiées, déformées, corrigées par ce que vit l'auteur et ce qui vibre en lui

Marie Etienne (French Poet, Editor of *Aujourd'hui Poème*):

Message emailed to Hoang Hung on June 15, 2002

A Man Returning Home

He is home from That
His wife cries all night, his kids are confused all day

Home from That
when he walks through the door, his friends' faces are ashen

Home from That
he feels an itch on the back of his head
in the midst of a crowd
as if someone is watching

One year later, he suddenly chokes during a party
Two years later, he sweats from his nightmares
Three years later, he feels pity for a lizard
Years later, he has the habit of sitting alone in darkness
Some days he feels a stranger's penetrating stare
Some nights, an aimless voice asks questions
He jumps
 at a touch to his shoulder

(Hoàng Hưng, from *Black Dog, Black Night: Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry*)

I placed this poem in my Admired Poems file because I was enamored of its use of the list. I love the way the discomforts of this man's life seem to simultaneously increase and decrease in magnitude. The "aimless voice ask[ing] questions" might have seemed less daunting had it come earlier in the poem, next to the mention of his kids for instance. But here at the end of the poem, when we find that physical comforts like "a touch to his shoulder" frighten him so, this voice becomes incredibly worrisome. What is the voice asking him to do? The line break after jumps is particularly effective given that the line "He jumps" comes in such proximity to the menace of those questions. Now the idea of the man jumping seems terribly alarming, and though we ought to be calmed by the fact that he's jumped at such a little thing, in the end the menace of the "touch to his shoulder" increases rather than dissipates. I also love the nonspecific word "That," and how, in this version of the poem, the word is presented capitalized and in italics. Hoàng Hưng allows the reader to decide what it is this man has returned from. I have conjectures, but the specific answer to what "That" might be is significantly less interesting than the answers we get to what "That" has done to the man. As with the details accumulated in the poem, the horror of what "That" might be accrues weight as the poem progresses.

Consider the way choices reflect anxieties. Or, consider the way anxieties reflect choices. Is there any difference between the two? Now write a poem.

(Camille Dungy, *A Few Prompts Drawn From Wandering/Home*)

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2009/07/a-few-prompts-drawn-from-wanderinghome/>

