

NGUYỄN DU  
*The Tale of Kiều*

A Bilingual Edition  
Translated by Huỳnh Sanh Thông



NGUYỄN DU

# THE TALE OF KIỀU

A BILINGUAL EDITION OF *TRUYỆN KIỀU*

*Translated and Annotated by Huỳnh Sanh Thông,  
with a Historical Essay by Alexander B. Woodside*

Yale University Press, New Haven and London

To Vietnamese refugees and their friends throughout  
the world

Tặng đồng-bào tị-nạn Việt-Nam cùng thân-hữu khắp  
thê-giới

Illustrations by Hồ Đắc Ngọc.

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## PREFACE

In 1973 Random House published my translation of Nguyễn Du's masterpiece under the title *The Tale of Kiều*, and it was received with a chorus of praise. Scholars and critics, glad to have a readable English version of the Vietnamese classic at last, chose to ignore its defects and notice only its virtues. But, as the one who had struggled for months with the long poem, line by line, often floundering in the gulf between the poet's pristine Vietnamese and my secondhand English, I viewed the result less kindly: I considered it to be no more than a tentative draft.

Ten years later, I now have an opportunity to provide readers with a revised edition, *The Tale of Kiều*. That *Kiều* has become *Kiều* implies not a small change but, rather, a breakthrough in American publishing of Vietnamese studies: alongside the translation, on facing pages, this book reproduces the complete text of *Truyện Kiều* in romanized script.

The parallel presence of the Vietnamese text also suggests something different about the translation: it is less free-wheeling and verbose, and it hews more closely to the original than did the 1973 version.

While the old edition was prepared chiefly with the general reader in mind, this one is intended to meet the needs of students and scholars: though by no means exhaustive and certainly inadequate as far as *Kiều* aficionados are concerned, the annotation has been increased manyfold. The introduction has been modified somewhat to take into account recent research and the history of the Vietnamese people over the past decade.

Alexander B. Woodside, who wrote the historical essay for the 1973 edition, has allowed it to be reprinted here with minor alterations. I am indebted to him for much more than that scholarly exercise alone: he was the first to recommend publication of what I had intended merely for classroom use at Yale, and since then he has never failed to support my efforts to make Vietnamese poetry available to the English-speaking world.

Many other colleagues and friends, with generous enthusiasm, have raised *The Tale of Kiều* to the status of required reading for Vietnamese studies and even for Southeast Asian or East Asian studies. Notable among them are John M. Echols, Alton Becker, John K. Whitmore, David G. Marr, Gerald C. Hickey, Nguyễn Dinh Hòa, Eric Henry, John C. Schafer, John Balaban, Marion W. Ross, Huệ-Tâm Hồ-Tai, Công-Huyền Tôn-Nữ Nha-Trang, Keith Taylor, Charles Benoit Jr., Trần Văn Dinh, and Trương Bửu Lâm.

That this bilingual edition of *Truyện Kiều* has appeared at all, when Vietnamese studies hardly flourish in the United States, is owing to the initiative of two Yale scholars whose areas of interest lie outside Vietnam: James C. Scott, a specialist in Malaysian politics; and James R. Rush, an Indonesia historian. Encouraged by their insistence that the Vietnamese classic should not stay out of print in English, I mustered enough faith and energy to undertake the difficult task of reworking my earlier rendition.

This book would not have been possible without the labor of numerous *Kiều* scholars, living or dead, whose names are listed in the bibliography. Special thanks I must save for Phạm Thái Chi, a gentleman of vast knowledge who, through both written messages and telephone calls from California to Connecticut, helped me make some textual decisions in an informed manner.

People at Yale University Press handled my manuscript with the care and flair that have graced all their publications. I would like to single out Ellen Graham, the editor, and Anne Mackinnon, the copy-editor, who brought consummate skill and sensitivity to her job.

After all due acknowledgments, the fact remains that this revised translation still does scant justice to the music and magic of Nguyễn Du's verse, and I must assume sole responsibility for any shortcomings of the book.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Alexander B. Woodside

All students of East Asian and Southeast Asian history and civilization will be profoundly grateful to Huỳnh Sanh Thông for giving English-speaking peoples, at last, such a shrewd and fastidious translation of one of the masterpieces of traditional Asian literature. To the Vietnamese people themselves, *The Tale of Kiều* is much more than just a glorious heirloom from their literary past. It has become a kind of continuing emotional laboratory in which all the great and timeless issues of personal morality and political obligation are tested and resolved (or left unresolved) for each new generation. Western readers who are curious about Vietnam and the Vietnamese may well gain more real wisdom from cultivating a discriminating appreciation of this one poem than they will from reading the entire library of scholarly and journalistic writings upon modern Vietnam which has accumulated in the West in the past two decades. As a vivid transcript of Vietnamese approaches to the dilemmas of the human condition, *The Tale of Kiều* has survived in, and gained new strength from, hundreds of different contexts. But what was the historical setting in which it was actually created?

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Vietnam was a society of perhaps seven or eight million people. In other words, its population was probably larger than that of the United States at the time of Washington's Farewell Address and almost as large as that of Great Britain, then just beginning to industrialize. Like the Japanese and the Koreans, the Vietnamese people had for many centuries belonged to what might well be called the East Asian classical world: they regarded themselves as the devoted heirs of those traditions of government, philosophy, literature, and moral and social theory which had been developed first in China in the age of the great Chinese philosophers, Confucius and Mencius and others, and then elaborated and changed by hundreds of succeeding generations of Chinese classical scholars. Even Vietnamese Buddhism eventually

acquired an East Asian classical complexion. It was the Mahayana Buddhism of China, Korea, and Japan, rather than the Theravada Buddhism of Siam and Burma, and all Vietnamese Buddhist sutras were carefully written in the classical Chinese language. The author of *The Tale of Kiều*, Nguyễn Du, who visited China as a Vietnamese ambassador to the Peking court, was a superb East Asian classicist in his own right, and as Huỳnh Sanh Thông so justly observes, *The Tale of Kiều* is a genuine “treasure-trove of classical Chinese learning.”

But the false conclusion many Western readers might be inclined to draw from such a summary is that Vietnam was simply a callow imitation, on a much smaller scale, of the Chinese empire. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. Each one of the four traditional East Asian societies had created its own distinct cultural world within the broader framework of the classical civilization to which all paid homage; Vietnamese ruling elites themselves deliberately controlled their cultural borrowing from China, and influences from elsewhere in Southeast Asia were also at work in many important and subtle ways in the march of Vietnamese daily life. To some extent, Nguyễn Du’s relationship to the East Asian classical world was really somewhat like the relationship of many of his Western literary contemporaries to their Greek and Roman classical traditions, and perhaps this observation may be of some help to readers who are baffled by the parade of Chinese allusions in *The Tale of Kiều*.

If Nguyễn Du makes some fifty references in his poem to the Chinese *Book of Odes* (whose songs date from about the tenth to the seventh century B.C.), much of the form and spirit of his English contemporary Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” is borrowed from Pindar, the Greek poet of the fifth century B.C. When another one of Nguyễn Du’s English contemporaries, John Keats, writes about the “dizzy pain” he feels after gazing at the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, or about the permanent “friend to man” that he finds in a Grecian urn, or about the world of high romance he tasted by looking into Chapman’s Homer, he expresses a rapturous adoration of the Greek classical tradition that Vietnamese poets matched, but could hardly transcend, in their admiration of the Chinese classical past.

It would not even be very difficult to go farther and compare the intense classical atmospheres in which political debates were conducted, and political decisions made, in Vietnam and in Western countries during the lifetime of Nguyễn Du. When a Western mis-

sionary informed the emperor Gia Long, Nguyễn Du’s master, that Christianity was 1,815 years old, the statement became intelligible to the Vietnamese court only when Gia Long’s official astronomer, Nguyễn Hữu Thận, converted the date of Christianity’s genesis to a point in the reign of the Chinese Han Yüan-ti emperor (a rather creative conversion, since Han Yüan-ti had ruled China from 48 to 32 B.C.). Gia Long himself sententiously declared in 1816 that the Chinese Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220, roughly contemporary with Rome), and not the many dynasties that had come after it, exemplified the highest ideals and the most successful patterns of human political behavior. But Gia Long’s obeisances to the memory of the Han empire were not remarkably different from Western invocations of the memory of Greece and Rome at about the same time. Political oratory during the French Revolution modeled itself upon Cicero’s speeches, and the entire Napoleonic era in France flaunted its Roman symbolism, from political titles to regimental insignia to David’s paintings. Even in the young American republic, the Senate took its name from a Roman institution, the names of cities and towns as far apart as Cincinnati, Ohio, and Athens, Georgia, were inspired by talismanic memories from Greek and Roman history, and Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia home was built as a proud imitation of a Roman villa.

To a considerable degree, then, *The Tale of Kiều* was the product of a world in which the hegemony of classical ideas and ornamentation was still almost as striking in the West as it was in East Asia; it was not a world in which the West had completely and irrevocably discarded its classical heritage and East Asia alone remained enclosed in a cocoon of traditionalism.

Moreover, Vietnam was not a completely static society whose institutions were in perfect equilibrium, even if it was not, like Europe, on the verge of dramatic industrial change. The author of *The Tale of Kiều* spent most of the first thirty-five years of his life (1765–1800) attempting to survive the Tây-sơn revolution. This vast social and political movement began in the south central frontier lands of Bình-dịnh Province in 1771, demolished all the existing governments of Vietnam with a flamboyant program of “virtuous and charitable banditry,” which included some very modest redistribution of upper-class wealth, and attained a brilliant climax with the triumphant defeat of an invading Chinese army in 1788–89. Nguyễn Du was not a supporter of the Tây-sons, and this fact demonstrates

the "historical limitations" of his thought in the eyes of some modern Vietnamese Marxist critics who cherish Du's poetry but also regard the Tây-sơn revolution as a miracle of military prowess and of attempted social emancipation. Impeccably loyal to the Lê dynasty (1427–1788), which the Tây-sôns had eventually destroyed, Du spent much of this period as an impoverished backwoods scholar, haunted by the tragedy of a vanished "orthodox succession" of emperors to which his family had been deeply attached and by the whirlpool of unstable, promiscuous political affiliations which had replaced it. It can be justly claimed, however, that Du was under very few illusions about the perversion of bureaucratic government and social morality in Vietnam which had stimulated the Tây-sòn movement. His descriptions of corrupt officials and of dealers in prostitutes—and, as Mr. Thông suggests, the spectral presence of the inspirational leader of the Tây-sôns, Nguyễn Huệ, in the character Tùi Hải—make this clear.

Du spent the last two decades of his life (1800–20) considering and practicing an unenthusiastic collaboration with the new rulers of Vietnam, the Nguyễn dynasty. The Nguyễn house, whose roots were in the central region and the south rather than in the north, ultimately repressed the exhausted Tây-sòn movement and made a new national capital at Huế in central Vietnam in 1802. Members of the old northern scholar class, of which Nguyễn Du was a member, found it possible to serve the first Nguyễn emperor, Gia Long (1802–20), because his reign promised peace and unification after nearly three centuries of disguised and undisguised political division and because the Nguyễn dynasty itself had not directly caused the downfall of their deeply mourned Lê monarchy. Their cooperation, however, often concealed an inner havoc of melancholy self-recrimination, resentment of the misfortunes of the past, and doubts about the future.

They knew that Gia Long did not depend entirely upon them: his power had also been augmented by the assistance of several hundred French engineers and soldiers of fortune. These exotic private servants of the new emperor designed imposing walled citadels for him on the sites of many provincial towns and also at Huế. But what one of Gia Long's senior officials called, in 1804, the "sights and grievances" of the luckless Vietnamese peasants who were forced to build the walls of Huế suggested that the dynasty was fatally widening the gulf between itself and ordinary Vietnamese society at a time when a

shattering military confrontation with the West was less than sixty years away. Nguyễn Du, of course, had no premonition of this coming confrontation. He could hardly have been oblivious, however, to recurrent storm signals from the countryside: some 105 peasant uprisings have been counted for the brief eighteen years of Gia Long's reign, including 18, or one per year, in Quảng Ngãi Province alone and a Triad Society insurrection in the north in the year 1807. It was against this background—the reluctant superimposition of a loyalty of convenience upon the memory of a true loyalty buried in the past, combined with an apprehensive consciousness of continuing social unrest despite the country's formal reunification—that Nguyễn Du wrote *The Tale of Kiều*.

It should be added that Nguyễn Du never enjoyed real political power of any kind after 1802, despite his formidable erudition and his nominal adherence to the political causes of Gia Long's empire. His official court biography, compiled in the nineteenth century, tells us that he served as a provincial prefect but resigned this post because of illness, that he was summoned to Huế in 1806 to serve in one of the imperial "scholars' pavilions," that he became a provincial registrar in 1809, that he served as an envoy on a Vietnamese tribute mission to China in 1813, that he was promoted for these services to the position of vice-president of the Huế Board of Rites, and that he died in 1820 as he was about to depart on another mission to China. But the Huế scholars' pavilions were usually little more than airless, apolitical sanctuaries which collected and employed elderly Lê dynasty scholars or supplied learned tutors to the children of the imperial family. Diplomatic missions to China, for their part, were customarily staffed with poetic masters of Chinese literature, who could represent Vietnamese politics in unimpeachably Chinese terms within the frigidly condescending atmosphere of a Peking audience hall.

Real power in Vietnam, almost to the time of Du's death, was awarded to the military paladins of the "Bangkok honor roll," to those homespun and unevenly educated soldiers from central and southern Vietnam who had endured exile with Gia Long in Siam before his final victory over the Tây-sôns. Northern civilians like Du were patronized but never generously admitted to the inner circles of the dynasty. And as late as 1836—sixteen years after Du's death, and at a time when Confucian civil service examinations rather than the "Bangkok honor roll" occupied the predominant place in Vietnamese political life—a bureaucrat serving in Du's home region

in north-central Vietnam could still observe that "there is a great amount of differentiation between southerners and northerners: because southerners are lucky enough to be flatterers, everything that they say and do occupies the position of advantage, and northerners in their innermost thoughts consider themselves to be shamed." Du himself publicly epitomized, almost unnaturally, this psychology of shamed subservience. On the occasion of his death, in 1820, the official "veritable records" of the court characterized him as a "frightened man who, each time he presented himself at an imperial audience, was terrified and anxious and could not reply."

The court chroniclers who produced this disdainful verdict had never made a greater error. Du was better able to reply than any other poet in Southeast Asia. Out of his personal agonies, which were shared by a whole generation of northern, upper-class scholars who had had to come to terms with a cankered world of compromises, he described the complicated moral pilgrimage of Kiêu. Kiêu's story stood, in effect, as a parable of the questings and the sadnesses of his own political life. Merely to write such a poem might have been dangerous, but Du's talents as a "national poet" seem to have won him the respect of the Nguyễn rulers.

A very thin and shadowy line separated literature from sedition in late traditional Vietnam. The forty-seven moral injunctions of the Lê emperors, first promulgated in 1663 and reissued in 1760, five years before Du was born, declared that only "classics, histories, philosophy, belles-lettres, and essays" could be printed and circulated among the Vietnamese population, that the "cutting of printing blocks and the engraving and printing" of "national tales" and of ballads and poems "which are associated with profligacy" were strictly forbidden. In the first year of Gia Long's reign, 1802, the uneducated soldier Nguyễn Văn Nhàn, who candidly admitted that he had not begun to read Chinese texts himself until he was fifty years old, designed a program for local education, "deeply commended" by the emperor, which ordered Vietnamese children to read the Chinese Five Classics and threatened with swift punishment all villagers who had become "addicted to songs and ballads." In this culturally authoritarian environment, insecure rulers suspected that even the flutes and the gongs of the tiniest village theatrical groups might convey the most deadly iconoclasms.

To look for philosophical uniformities in *The Tale of Kiêu* would of course be idle. Different philosophies mingle in the poem, and

Confucian language mingles with Buddhist language. Yet the work is a moral tale in which the commonplace determinisms of Buddhist popular evangelism, while inevitably present, may well be sharply subdued. The Buddhist doctrine of "cause and effect"—the belief that there are inescapable relationships between present existences and past and future existences, and that crimes committed during past existences preordain miseries in the present—is prominent enough, but is it the central theme? Du does not make the slightest effort to portray anything but the current existence of Kiêu. He divides her life into two parts, the time of misfortune and degradation which comes to an end when she throws herself into the Ch'ien-t'ang River, and the time of restoration and happiness after she is rescued, when she is compensated for her sufferings. The Buddhist belief that the full passions of love are "retribution," mechanically leading to more pain—"To passion sorrow clings and won't let go," intones the prophetess Tam Hợp—may not be of cardinal importance to Nguyễn Du's extraordinary vision either. After all, he does not make Kiêu regret her one lifelong love, but instead makes her fear that she has committed an offense against her lover, Kim Trọng, by her forced ventures into decadence. Perhaps the real meaning of Nguyễn Du (at least on one level) is that passion does not, by itself, bring punishment in the next world but must, to be moral, carry important redemptive, self-denying obligations with it in this world. Morality is painful and difficult, and happiness is only a qualified and far from utopian reward at the end, not the constant comfort of even the truly moral person. Despite its trappings of astrology and metempsychosis, the poem in this sense becomes a remarkable hymn to individual fortitude and individual moral responsibility.

What, however, would this signify in historical terms? Du's apparent emphasis upon decision making and the moderately positive results it can bring in this world, rather than upon utopian salvation in the next, suggests a tougher, less mystical creed than those cherished by many other members of Vietnamese society in the early 1800s. Popular Buddhist movements among the peasantry—for example, the "Precious Mountain Miraculous Fragrance" (*Bíu Sơn Kỳ Hương*) movement which evolved in Sa-déc Province in the south in 1849—rarely pretended that "hidden merits" and individual moral industry could "tip the scale" in this world rather than in the next. The adherents of these powerful, Vietnamized offshoots of the Chinese White Lotus religion hoped instead for a dazzling apoc-

apocalypse, for the time of the great “dragon flower” meeting when the messiah Buddha would descend to earth in a cloud of fragrant scents and ethereal fireworks and end all human tribulations. There appears to be, in short, an outlook in *The Tale of Kiều* that was by no means completely ordinary in early nineteenth-century Vietnam, an outlook that modern, more secularized Vietnamese intellectuals find hospitable and that Vietnamese revolutionaries, faced with their own fatiguing and sometimes temporarily humiliating pilgrimages to a better future, find inspiring. The historian must take note of the surprisingly modern qualities in this work, as well as of its synoptic recitation of the vicissitudes of a bygone classical age.

Thanks to Huỳnh Sanh Thông’s imaginative, painstaking artistry, a great literary synthesis of the Vietnamese experience has finally been imported into the English-speaking world. In this world, one historian is confident, the wandering soul of Nguyễn Du will find more than a few admirers of a poignant if highly deceptive “tale of love recorded in old books.”

## INTRODUCTION

Annexed to the Chinese empire for almost a millennium, Vietnam did not become an independent state until 939. Even then, the ruling elite clung to Chinese government institutions as the best safeguards against reconquest. Classical Chinese remained the official language up to the second half of the nineteenth century, when the French imposed their dominion over the country.

But as national self-confidence grew, a movement arose to promote Vietnamese as a vehicle for creative expression among scholars. During the fourteenth century a demotic script called *chữ nôm* (the “Southern script,” as opposed to the script of the “Northerners” or the Chinese) first came into currency. It was a rather cumbersome system for representing the sounds of the vernacular with characters adapted from Chinese, but it had an electrifying effect on literature, freeing writers to explore and exploit the resources of their native culture.

The marriage of Chinese classical influences and Vietnamese folk traditions begot the most remarkable genre in Vietnamese literature, the long narrative poem known as *truyện nôm*, or the “tale in the Southern script.” Often based on Chinese works of prose fiction, the poems were written in a form accessible to the masses: *lục-bát*, or “six-eight,” verse, the prevalent meter of folk poetry.\* Reduced to its smallest unit, six-eight verse is a couplet with six syllables in the first line and eight syllables in the second; in contrast, most Chinese poetry has an odd number of syllables (five or seven) in each line.

Many Vietnamese folk poems are simply six-eight couplets, shorter than Japanese *haiku*. But any number of the couplets can be strung together into a continuous, unbroken whole without inducing monotony. By using end rhymes and internal rhymes at the sixth syllable of an eight-syllable line, one can make each line rhyme with

\*For a fuller discussion of six-eight verse, read the introduction to *The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry*, edited and translated by Huỳnh Sanh Thông (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1979), pp. xxv–xlvi.

the next and at the same time introduce a fresh rhyme in every other line. Two more characteristics of six-eight verse should be noted: it is predominantly iambic, and the accented syllables follow a definite pattern of flat and sharp tones.

Since rhyme, meter, and tonal regularity all make long stretches of six-eight verse easier to memorize and recite than any other form of poetry, it is an ideal medium for oral transmission, perfectly adapted to the needs of a writer of long narrative poems. In old Vietnam, publication of books was severely limited, not only because printing was scarce in a subsistence economy but also because of government curbs. Furthermore, only the educated minority could read books, since the Southern script required an extensive knowledge of Chinese characters. To reach the general public, the sole method was to have professional or amateur bards learn the poems by heart and recite them.

The long narrative poem in six-eight verse, which developed during the seventeenth or eighteenth century, reached its culmination in *The Tale of Kiều* by Nguyễn Du (1765–1820). According to tradition, the poet originally entitled it *Đoán trường tân thanh* (“A New Cry from a Broken Heart”). He showed the manuscript to his fellow scholar Phạm Quý Thích (1760–1825), who loved it so much that, after doing some minor editing, he undertook the task of having it engraved and printed in Hanoi under a different title: *Kim Vân Kiều tân truyện* (“A New Version of the Tale of Kim, Vân, and Kiều”). To millions of Vietnamese it is known as *The Tale of Kim, Vân, and Kiều* (*Truyện Kim-Vân-Kiều*), as *The Tale of Kiều* (*Truyện Kiều*), or simply as *Kiều*. A perfect example of the long narrative poem in six-eight verse, it has also stood unchallenged since its publication and dissemination in the second decade of the nineteenth century as the supreme masterwork of Vietnamese literature. And through its pervasive popularity, little short of adulatory worship, among both scholars and illiterates and in all spheres of life, its author, Nguyễn Du, has achieved a status seldom equaled by a writer in his or her own country. The only other example that readily comes to mind is Alexander Pushkin, for *Eugene Onegin*.

Both the original title and the one given by Phạm Quý Thích suggest that Nguyễn Du did not invent the story himself but borrowed it from another source. It was, in fact, a Chinese prose novel, a copy of which he may have found while he was traveling in China from 1813 to 1814 as a diplomatic envoy to the Manchu court. It is a narrative entitled *Chin Yün Ch'iao chuan* (“The Tale of Chin, Yün,

and Ch'iao”) by a shadowy figure who called himself the “Pure-Hearted Man of Parts” (Ch'ing-hsin Ts'ai-jen; in Vietnamese, Thanh-tâm Tài-nhân). American scholars such as Charles Benoit, Jr., and Eric P. Henry believe that the author must have lived during the earlier years of the Ch'ing dynasty. Each of the twenty chapters carries appreciative comment ascribed—fraudulently, in all likelihood—to the famous critic Chin Sheng-t'an (Kim Thánh Thán; ca. 1610–61), who could not have lavished praise on such a mediocre work. The novel is about historical figures who lived and died under the Ming dynasty. In 1554, Governor Hu Tsung-hsien (Hồ Tôn Hiền) mounted a campaign to quell the revolt led by Hsü Hai (Tù Hải), whose troops controlled the seacoast area of Fukien and Chekiang. Unable to vanquish him by force of arms, Hu bribed Hsü's mistress, a former courtesan named Wang Ts'ui-ch'iao (Vương Thúy Kiều); she persuaded the rebel to surrender, and he was killed. Forced to marry a “barbarian” (a tribal chief), she drowned herself. But in the novel the anonymous author allowed her to be rescued and reunited with her family.

The Vietnamese poem broadly follows the events in the Chinese novel (which includes Wang Ts'ui-ch'iao's life in Peking and love affair with Chin Chung before she sold herself to ransom her father and unwittingly embarked upon a career in vice). But Nguyễn Du has reduced the number of incidents and personae, condensing a longish novel into a spare poem of 1,627 couplets which, through the magic of his art, springs to life as a world revolving around a creature of fiction that has become a person of flesh and blood in the minds and hearts of most Vietnamese: Kiều.

As a medium for literature in Vietnam, the native tongue had been fighting a difficult battle against classical Chinese since the early part of the fifteenth century, when Nguyễn Trãi (1380–1442) wrote his short poems of four or eight lines. In a poem of over three thousand lines, Nguyễn Du led that fight to a victorious conclusion. Weaving foreign and national elements into a seamless, shimmering fabric, the poet dressed Kiều the prostitute in clothing fit for a queen: his masterpiece is a celebration of the Vietnamese language in all its diversity, with all its resources of rhythm and tone, of sound and image, of terse and rich expression. By triumphantly rescuing Vietnamese poetry from the stranglehold of classical Chinese, Nguyễn Du performed for the vernacular what Dante had once done for Italian, liberating it from its position of subservience to Latin.

The *Kiều* poem's appeal to scholars is easy to understand. Nguyễn

Du pays loving attention to the fine points of a classical poet's craft. For example, when Kiều first sees the abandoned grave of Đạm Tiên, a courtesan, she contents herself with writing a *chüeh-chü* ("cut-off lines") quatrain to commemorate the occasion. But after Đạm Tiên's ghost appears in answer to her prayer, Kiều gets carried away—"a poet's feelings, rife with anguish, flowed" (line 131)—and she writes a *ku-shih* ('old-style') poem, a freer form with a flexible rhyme scheme, which does not require a fixed number of lines or words in a line.

The poem is a treasure-trove of classical Chinese learning. A study made in Hanoi has identified in it some fifty quotations from *The Book of Odes*, the Confucian anthology of verse; some fifty references to other Confucian classics; some sixty translations or adaptations of various Chinese poems; some seventy allusions to Chinese works of fiction; and about twenty mentions of Buddhist or Taoist scriptures. Such erudition, if indiscriminately displayed in an imaginative work, runs the risk of boring or even offending. But in *Kiều* it fits so gracefully into the texture of the poem, it is so apposite to the purpose in each case, that it may elude the average reader while it surprises and delights the connoisseur. When Kiều is trapped in a second bawdyhouse and complains of Heaven's cruelty toward women, she does so by a play on words: *Hồng-quân* ('Heaven') and *hồng-quần* ('[those who wear] red skirts'). Then, addressing *Hồng-quân*, she says, "You've spun me so, yet you won't let me off" (line 2158). The metaphor takes alert readers aback—suddenly it dawns on them that the phrase *Hồng-quân*, which is vaguely understood by most people to indicate Heaven, God, or the Creator, is being used here in its exact meaning: the Great Potter's Wheel.

Nguyễn Du's allusions to other poets and poems are also both pertinent and unobtrusive. Consider the line "Birds flocked the branch, winds stirred the leaves" (line 1231). In context, it implies that Kiều attracts many customers to the brothel. While nobody can miss the point, a reader's enjoyment will be sharpened after realizing that the line is a neat paraphrase of two lines from a poem by a renowned T'ang courtesan, Hsüeh T'ao (Tiết Dao): "The branch greets birds from south and north. / The leaves sway back and forth with winds." Similarly, the poet describes the rebel Tù Háí as follows: "Plying his oar, he roved the streams and lakes / with sword and lute upon his shoulders slung" (lines 2173–74). Anyone can picture Tù as a free spirit and a sensitive soul, but the informed reader will also recognize here the self-portrait of Huang Ch'ao (Hoàng Sào), the

T'ang scholar-rebel who captured Ch'ang-an in 881 and reigned briefly as emperor. When Kiều's younger sister, Vân, urges her to wed Kim Trọng after a fifteen-year separation, she says: "The tree still bears some three or seven plums, / the peach stays fresh" (lines 3075–76). It is clear she means that Kiều is not too old for matrimony, but the East Asian classicist will spot at once deft allusions to two songs of courtship and marriage in *The Book of Odes*.

Nguyễn Du's artistry goes far beyond esoteric games, however. His poem illustrates the craft of fiction in its more universal aspects and deserves to be called a novel in the modern sense. His numerous pithy, yet vivid, descriptions of nature, for example, never appear for their picturesque value alone but always accomplish a narrative or psychological purpose.

There is the cycle of seasons—"the moon hare and the sun crow whirled round" (line 1269)—as the plot unfolds. It all started on a beautiful third day of the third month: "Swift swallows and spring days were shuttling by—/ of ninety radiant ones three score had fled. / Young grass spread all its green to heaven's rim; / some blossoms marked pear branches with white dots" (lines 39–42). Summer begins: "As windswept days and moonlit nights wheeled round, / red dimmed, green deepened—spring was past and gone" (lines 369–70) and "For summer cuckoos cried beneath the moon; / above the wall pomegranates kindled fire" (lines 1307–08). In the ominous autumn, things happen as leaves turn: "Now, in the courtyard, planes mixed gold with jade. / Along the hedge, frost-hardy mums peeped out" (lines 1386–87). The seasonal circuit is also associated with the healing process of time, as when young Thúc gradually accustoms himself to the erroneous idea that Kiều has perished in a fire: "Just as the lotus wilts, the mums bloom forth—/ time softens grief, and winter turns to spring" (lines 1795–96).

When Kiều awakes to love and portents of sorrow after she has met Kim Trọng and found Đạm Tiên's grave on the same day, the moon becomes a silent witness to the secrets of a soul torn between hope and fear: "Outside the window, squinting, peeped the moon—/ gold spilled on waves, trees shadowed all the yard" (lines 173–74). At a crucial moment of their tryst, the lovers are not alone: "The stark bright moon was gazing from the skies / as with one voice both mouths pronounced the oath" (lines 449–50). Necessity compels her to break that oath, and as she follows Scholar Mâ, who has bought her, she is reminded of her betrayal: "A road that stretched far off in

hushed, still night: / she saw the moon, felt shame at her love vows" (lines 915–16).

Not only the moon but nature as a whole joins in the story, providing an appropriate background for the action, adumbrating events to come or mirroring the state of mind of the chief protagonists. In Confucian society, for a nubile girl to obey her impulses and go to her lover's apartments was tantamount to a deadly sin, so the poet prepares the reader of his times for the shock. Seemingly innocent passages of description foreshadow Kiều's deed: "East drooped a red camellia, toward the next house: / as dewdrops fell, the spring branch bent and bowed" (lines 175–76) and "Outside the window chirped an oriole—/ over the wall a catkin flew next door" (lines 239–40). As young Thúc leaves his spouse behind and rides at a gallop to rejoin Kiều, his true love, the landscape takes on the hues of his mood: "waters, all gleaming, mirrors for the sky, / walls wreathed in sapphire mist, peaks gilt with sun" (lines 1603–04). But, "when you feel grief, can what you see give joy?" (line 1244). The lyricism of folk poetry informs the depiction of a twilight scene viewed through Kiều's eyes as she, a captive in the brothel, wonders about her future: "She sadly watched the harbor in gray dusk—/ whose boat was that with fluttering sails, far off? / She sadly watched the river flow to sea—/ where would this flower end, adrift and lost? / She sadly watched the field of wilted grass, / the bluish haze where merged the earth and clouds. / She sadly watched the wind whip up the cove / and set all waves a-roaring round her seat" (lines 1047–54).

Despite the strict economy of a poem in which fewer than thirty-five hundred lines encompass a host of incidents, Nguyễn Du brings a wide range of techniques to bear on character delineation. With precise strokes, he conjures up a gallery of portraits that breathe both in their physical presence and in their psychological identity. Here is Kim Trọng, "a scion of the noblest stock" (line 148), endowed with the expected attributes of a member of the Confucian aristocracy, yet memorable in himself: "They saw a youthful scholar come their way / astride a colt he rode with slackened rein. / He carried poems packing half his bag, / and tagging at his heels were some page boys. / His frisky horse's coat was dyed with snow. / His gown blent tints of grass and pale blue sky" (lines 135–40); "His figured slippers trod the green—the field / now sparkled like some jade-and-ruby grove" (lines 143–44); and "Born into wealth and talent, he'd received / his wit from heaven, a scholar's trade from men. / Manner

and mien set him above the crowd: / he studied books indoors, lived high abroad" (lines 149–52).

Though he uses clichés that embody Chinese canons of feminine beauty, Nguyễn Du succeeds in contrasting the two Vương sisters: "Bodies like slim plum branches, snow-pure souls: / each her own self, each perfect in her way" (lines 17–18). Destined for domestic felicity, the younger sister evinces a somewhat dull, placid sort of comeliness: "In quiet grace Văn was beyond compare: / her face a moon, her eyebrows two full curves; / her smile a flower, her voice the song of jade; / her hair the sheen of clouds, her skin white snow" (lines 19–22). We do not count on her to feel too deeply about anything, and when she chides Kiều for crying over Đạm Tiên's grave her words ring true: "My sister, you should be laughed at, / lavishing tears on one long dead and gone!" (lines 105–06). On the other hand, Kiều's melancholy charm and artistic temperament indicate a predisposition to sorrow: "Her eyes were autumn streams, her brows spring hills. / Flowers grudged her glamour, willows her fresh hue. / A glance or two from her, and kingdoms rocked! / Supreme in looks, she had few peers in gifts. / By Heaven blessed with wit, she knew all skills: / she could write verse and paint, could sing and chant. / Of music she had mastered all five tones / and played the lute far better than Ai Chang. / She had composed a song called *Cruel Fate* / to mourn all women in soul-rending strains" (lines 25–34).

But it is in the portrayal of villains that Nguyễn Du's brush, unhampered by the dead weight of stereotypes, is most striking. Here is Mā, scholar turned pimp: "Past forty, far beyond the bloom of youth, / he wore a smooth-shaved face and smart attire" (lines 627–28) and "Scholar Mā, the rogue, / had always patronized the haunts of lust. / The rake had hit a run of blackest luck: / in whoredom our whoremaster sought his bread" (lines 805–08). Mā shows his truest colors when he is allowed to speak in his own behalf. In this interior monologue, caught between profit and lust, he debates whether he should exercise his marital right to Kiều or deliver her intact to his wife, Dame Tù, who runs a brothel: "The flag has come to hand! / I view rare jade—it stirs my heart of gold! / The kingdom's queen of beauty! Heaven's scent! / One smile of hers is worth pure gold—it's true. / When she gets there, to pluck the maiden bud, / princes and gentlefolk will push and shove. / She'll bring at least three hundred liang, about / what I have paid—net profit after that. / A morsel dangles at my mouth—what God / serves up I crave, yet

money hate to lose. / A heavenly peach within a mortal's grasp: / I'll bend the branch, pick it, and quench my thirst. / How many flower-fanciers on earth / can really tell one flower from the next? / Juice from pomegranate skin and cockscomb blood / will heal it up and lend the virgin look. / In dim half-light some yokel will be fooled: / she'll fetch that much, and not one penny less. / If my old broad finds out and makes a scene, / I'll take it like a man, down on my knees! / Besides, it's still a long, long way from home: / if I don't touch her, later she'll suspect" (lines 823–44).

From the soliloquy we can surmise that the academic pimp has met more than his match in the "old broad," "whose wealth of charms was taxed by creeping age" (line 810). We catch a glimpse of her outward appearance: "One noticed at first glance her pallid skin— / what did she feed upon to gain such bulk?" (lines 923–24). The bawd's vulgarity, however, can be fully conveyed only in her own words, which gush out when she learns that Scholar Mā has tampered with Kiēu: "Her devils, fiends, and demons all broke loose: / 'What happened is as plain as day to see! / She caught my man alive for her own use! / I sent him for some lass to bring back here / and put to work as hostess, earn our bread. / But that false-hearted knave, that beastly rogue / had his damn itch—he played and messed with her. / Now that the cloth has lost all starch and glaze, / there goes to hell the money I put up! / You little strumpet, they sold you to me, / and in my house you go by my house rules. / When that old lecher tried his dirty trick, / why did you listen? Slap his face, instead! / Why did you just lie there and take it all? / The merest chit, do you already rut? / I must teach you how I lay down the law.' / She grabbed a whip, about to pounce and lash" (lines 962–78).

Miss Hoan is in a class by herself as a villain. The daughter of a prime minister, she is married to young Thúc, who prefers the charms of a prostitute. Ferocious in her jealousy, she still commands our admiration by her self-control and ability to present a brave front to the world despite her husband's escapade: "His garden boasted now a fresh-blown rose— / so she had heard from every mouth but his. / The fire of wrath kept smoldering in her breast / against the knave whose fickle heart had roamed: / 'If only he'd confessed, told me the truth, / I might have favored her with my good grace. / I'd be a fool to lose my stately calm / and gain the stigma of a jealous shrew. / But he's thought fit to pull his boyish prank / and hide his open secret—what a farce! / He's fancied distance keeps me unaware. / Let's hide

and seek—I too shall play his game. / I entertain no worry on this score: / the ant's inside the cup—where can it crawl? / I'll make them loathe and shun each other's sight. / I'll crush her so she cannot rear her head. / I'll rub the spectacle in his bare face / and make the traitor feel my iron hand'" (lines 1535–52). This is a preview of what is lying in store for her husband and Kiēu: "She locked her anger deep inside her heart / and let all rumors breeze right past her ears. / Later, two louts came bearing their report, / hoping to earn due wages for their pains. / The lady in high dudgeon thundered forth: / I loathe pert knaves who'll weave, embroider things! / My husband's not a common, vulgar churl: / mouths with less truth than froth have spat this lie.' / She bade her lackeys execute her law, / slapping their mouths and knocking out their teeth. / An awestruck hush now settled on her house: / nobody risked another single peep. / In her pink room she'd idle morn and eve, / she'd chat and laugh as if naught were amiss" (lines 1553–66). She will give a hellish time to her rival—yet it is part of Nguyễn Du's humane touch to make us feel much sympathy for the "lioness": she is defending the integrity of her home. This is clear as she puts her case before Kiēu at the trial: "I have a woman's mind, a petty soul, / and jealousy's a trait all humans share" (lines 2365–66) and "I felt esteem for you in my own heart— / what woman, though, would gladly share her man?" (lines 2369–70). Forgiving her and letting her go scot-free, Kiēu shows mercy founded on a special sense of justice.

When a highborn lady eschews rhetoric and speaks the plain language of passion, it is realism—an important facet of Nguyễn Du's artistry which endears him to a vast public. Linked to such fidelity to life is his sense of comedy, a rare attribute in a classical poet. It was deemed far beneath the dignity of a Confucian gentleman to smile, let alone laugh. With few exceptions, classical Vietnamese literature presents an air of grim seriousness at best and dismal gloom at worst, and this lack of gaiety fails to reflect the temperament of the average, un-Confucianized Vietnamese, who can joke under the most solemn or trying circumstances. Colloquial speech abounds in words and phrases for mirth and derision.

Nguyễn Du often imparts an ironic twist to some learned cliché and makes it look fresh again. A favorable wind once drove the young Wang Po's boat to Prince T'eng's palace, where he attended a banquet and delivered a brilliant address in parallel prose and thus made his name overnight. To scholars the phrase *duyên Đằng* ("fate

that takes one to Prince T'eng's palace") has served as a metaphor for good fortune and success in the literary world. But the Vietnamese poet chooses to apply the trope to a nonliterary event, young Thúc's marriage to Miss Hoan—which, on reflection, is quite apropos after all: since scholars viewed literature mostly as an avenue to membership in the ruling elite with all its privileges and perquisites, to wed the daughter of a minister of state was, for all practical purposes, to reach Prince T'eng's palace in time for a feast. Likewise, the expression "fish-cress and perch" (*thuần úc*) is supposed to evoke homesickness by its allusion to Chang Han, who resigned from office on an autumn day and went back to his village because he missed the taste of those two common dishes of his native countryside. But Nguyễn Du uses the stock phrase to suggest that young Thúc begins to get tired of home cooking and his wife as the sights and sounds of autumn prompt him to dream of more exotic fare: "To perch and fish-cress he'd begun to take / when down the well planes dropped a few gold leaves" (lines 1593–94).

If that kind of wit is too subtle for those unfamiliar with the allusions, Nguyễn Du's sense of humor chuckles almost audibly in other places, such as Scholar Mᾶ's soliloquy. Sometimes, the poet lets a ludicrous situation speak for itself: "Between, an altar all rigged out: above, / the image of that god with hoary brows. / In bawdy-houses old tradition bids / them worship him as patron of their trade, / offer him flowers, burn incense day and night. / When some jinxed gal drew too few customers, / in front of him she'd doff her shirt and skirt, / then light some incense candles mumbling prayer. / She'd take all faded flowers to line her mat, / and bees would swarm a-buzzing all around!" (lines 929–38). More often, for comic relief, the poet draws on the inexhaustible supply of folk sayings, which he chooses with an uncanny flair. How else to poke fun at the marriage of an aging prostitute and an aging debauchee but to call it a meeting of "sawdust and a bitter melon"? The proverbial phrase "sawdust and bitter melon" (*mạt cưa muরp dâng*) comes from a folk tale: a hawker who foisted sawdust (*mạt cưa*) as rice bran on unwary customers came across another who passed bitter melons (*muরp dâng*) off for cucumbers—the two traded their goods, duping each other.

Yet, despite the squalor and sordidness in the story, *Kiều* is basically a romance—another reason for its enduring popularity. Love is the subject of many Vietnamese tales in verse, but no poet

other than Nguyễn Du has depicted it in all its mystery and variety. There is no rational explanation for it: "Unbidden, love will seek those meant for love" (line 2206). It may strike someone as hardened as a ruler of men: "Entranced, he heard her; spellbound, he watched her. / O miracle, love disturbed an iron mask!" (lines 2579–80). To Kiều, love happens three times, for three quite different men, Kim Trọng, Thúc Ký Tâm, and Tùr Hải: "Of course, when two kin spirits meet, one tie / soon binds them in a knot none can yank loose" (lines 1287–88)—still, each tie has its own texture, its own resiliency.

With Kim, it is first love, at first sight: "What stirred their hearts their eyes still dared not say" (line 164). Nguyễn Du knows how to express the psychic turmoil that accompanies an adolescent's discovery of the other sex: "How strange, the race of lovers! Try as you will, / you can't unsnarl their hearts' entangled threads" (lines 243–44). Seldom has the erratic behavior of a boy in the throes of love been rendered with such acute yet affectionate perception, as if the poet were reminiscing about his own youth and mocking himself: "Since Kim was back inside his book-lined walls, / he could not drive her from his haunted mind. / He drained the cup of gloom: it filled anew— / one day without her seemed three autumns long. / Silk curtains veiled her windows like dense clouds, / and toward the rose within he'd dream his way. / The moon kept waning, oil kept burning low: / his face yearned for her face, his heart her heart. / The study-room turned icy, metal-cold— / brushes lay dry, lute strings hung loose on frets. / Hsiang bamboo blinds stirred rustling in the wind— / incense roused longing, tea lacked love's sweet taste. / If fate did not mean them to join as mates, / why had the temptress come and teased his eyes? / Forlorn, he missed the scene, he missed the girl: / he rushed back where by chance the two had met. / A tract of land with grasses lush and green, / with waters crystal-clear: he saw naught else. / The breeze at twilight stirred a mood of grief— / the reeds waved back and forth as if to taunt. / A lover's mind is full of her he loves: / he walked straight on and made toward her Blue Bridge" (lines 245–66).

According to Confucian ethics it was unspeakable for a well-bred girl to meet a boy in secret in his room—yet Nguyễn Du convinces us of the purity of Kiều's motives and gives us a romantic heroine's eloquent case for premarital continence: "Treat not our love as just a game— / please stay away from me and let me speak. / What is a mere peach blossom that one should / fence off the garden, thwart the bluebird's quest? / But you've named me your bride—to serve her man, /

she must place chastity above all else. / They play in mulberry groves along the P'u, / but who would care for wenches of that ilk? / Are we to snatch the moment, pluck the fruit, / and in one sole day wreck a lifelong trust? / Let's ponder those love stories old and new—what well-matched pair could equal Ts'ui and Chang? / Yet passion's storms did topple stone and bronze: / she cloyed her lover humoring all his whims. / As wing to wing and limb to limb they lay, / contempt already lurked beside their hearts. / Under the western roof the two burned out / the incense of their vow, and love turned shame. / If I don't cast the shuttle in defense, / we'll later blush for it—who'll bear the guilt? / Why force your wish on your shy flower so soon? / While I'm alive, you'll sometime get your due" (lines 501–22). Kim is never to get his due, however. At the end of the story, he and Kiều are reunited and joined in wedlock, but the union remains unconsummated. He reluctantly complies with her scruples: "To live in concord, need two share one bed?" (line 3178) and "Their wishes all came true since fate so willed, / and of two lovers marriage made two friends" (lines 3225–26).

But it would be a mistake to infer from this that Nguyễn Du was a prude. He is one of the very few classical East Asian poets to celebrate physical love frankly but within the bounds of good taste. He cannot be accused of pandering to any prurient interest—a mildly pornographic passage in the original Chinese novel is reduced in his poem to this professional lecture by the bawd: "The trade of love, my girl, takes care and pains, / and we who ply it must know all its tricks. / . . . Men are all alike: / they'll get their money's worth or won't come here. / There are more things to love than meet the eye / and ways to cope with men by day or dark. / Know these by heart—learn seven ploys to catch / and hold a man, eight ways to please in bed. / Play love with them until you've played them out, / till heads must swim, till hearts of stone must spin. / Now flirt with eyebrows, now coquet with lips. / Now sing the moon, now sport among the flowers. / There you have it, our house's stock in trade: / learn it and be a mistress of our craft" (lines 1201–16).

The love between Kiều and the weak-willed Thúc eventually matures into a deep attachment, but sexual attraction is its main ingredient, and Nguyễn Du takes care to stress the point. Here is homage paid to Kiều's beauty: "A woman's charms, O wondrous tidal waves / that tumble homes and topple halls like toys!" (lines 1301–02) and "Lo, such pure jade and such white ivory! / Her body

stood as Heaven's masterwork" (lines 1311–12). Sexual intercourse is described in a restrained but intense manner: "Behind the tasseled drapes he faced the flower: / his fancy relished each of all her charms. / The young camellia, shimmering on its stem, / would glow still brighter with each fresh spring shower! / Man and girl, girl and man in severed clasp: / on a spring night, how can one quell the heart?" (lines 1281–86). We are made to feel the poignancy of the lovers' grief when they have to part: "She walked back home to face the night alone, / and by himself he fared the long, long way. / Who split the lovers' moon? Half stayed and slept / by her lone pillow, half lit his far road" (lines 1523–26).

In most ways the opposite of young Thúc, Tù Há is the strong man whom Kiều can look up to and lean on. When "eyes meet eyes and heart encounters heart" (line 2178), she is shrewd enough to sense his potential greatness. He is both flattered by and grateful for her keen insight: "Two kindred souls have joined . . . / We're not those giddy fools who play at love. / For long I've heard them rave about your charms, / but none's won favor yet in your clear eyes. / How often have you lucked upon a *man*? / Why bother with caged birds or fish in pots?" (lines 2179–84) and "Through life how many know what moves one's soul? / Those eyes be praised that, keen and worldly-wise, / can see the hero hid in common dust! / Your words prove you discern me from the rest— / we'll sit together when I sit on high" (lines 2200–04). Tù feels for Kiều a tender, protective, indulgent kind of love; he wants to right the wrongs she has suffered, see to her comfort and well-being, grant her every wish and desire. In the end, he meets his doom because "love for a woman bent a hero's will" (line 2176). She takes full blame for his death: "A hero was my Tù—he went his way / beneath the skies, he roamed the open seas. / I talked, he listened overtrusting me— / the victor laid down arms to serve at court! / He hoped to gain the world for man and wife— / alas, he came to nothing in a trice. / Five years he roved between the sky and sea, / then dropped his body on the field like trash" (lines 2549–56).

In addition to its romance, Nguyễn Du's poem shares other features with works of fiction that have mass appeal. It is a melodrama that throbs with violent incidents, including war: "Gray phantoms, fumes of slaughter leapt the skies / as sharks roved streams and armored men prowled roads" (2251–52) and "Imperial troops rushed forward giving chase— / death vapors blasted men, choked up the skies" (lines 2523–24). It is a story that caters to folk beliefs

in supernatural phenomena: the brooding presence of Đạm Tiên's ghost, fortune-telling, witchcraft, Tù Hải's deification in death. The Vietnamese people have given Nguyễn Du's poem the ultimate accolade in this respect: they have consulted it for divination purposes, to which it lends itself quite well because, within its scope, it covers most life circumstances, from the highest to the lowest, the happiest to the saddest.

But the beauty and forcefulness of the work cannot alone explain the spell Nguyễn Du's poem has cast over the Vietnamese, peasants and scholars alike. They all have found in it some common denominator about their world that touches a chord in their collective psyche. A clue, perhaps, is a word that recurs throughout the poem: *oan*. The nearest equivalent in English is a past participle: *wronged*. A story purporting to recount events that occurred in Ming China manages to project one stark, readily recognizable image about Vietnam—the picture of victims, of people punished for crimes or sins they are not aware they have committed.

Down the ages, more than most other peoples, the Vietnamese have known a history marked by turbulence and torment, by natural or human forces unleashed against helpless individuals. Time and again, typhoons have devastated the delta and coastal area of north and central Vietnam with its dense population: they are, indeed, "disasters that come flying on the wind" (*vợ gió tai bay*), acts of God visited on innocent heads. But more often than not, the phrase refers figuratively (as it does in the poem) to misfortunes wreaked on men by more powerful men, who impose their arbitrary will from above. Those masters could be foreigners: after conquest and despite endemic rebellion, the Chinese and the French ruled the country and had the people at their mercy for a total of over a thousand years. But the Vietnamese suffered at the hands of their fellow countrymen, too; with few exceptions, native rulers were also tyrants. To survive constant Chinese pressure as well as the challenge of other pretenders to the throne and the ever-present threat of peasant revolts, Vietnamese monarchs had to adopt and maintain a state apparatus patterned on the Chinese model, an instrument designed more for repression and suppression than for justice.

In theory, the sovereign acted as the "lamp of Heaven" (*dèn Trời*), shining justice on all, but in practice he never would or could get close enough to the people to hear their grievances: "This wrong / could they appeal to Heaven far away?" (lines 595–96); "When wronged,

can flies and ants demand redress?" (line 1758). To keep law and order through the realm, the sovereign had to depend on local scholar-officials who, often underpaid, were tacitly encouraged to live off their charges. Corruption was built into the system—in dealing with officials, the people had to learn to "pave this way and clear that path" (*lót dô luôn dây*). There were high-principled mandarins, of course, but even they tended to prefer a decorous aloofness from the populace, lest familiarity should breed contempt and undermine authority: "Play with a dog, and it will lick your face" (*Chơi với chó chó liếm mặt*), says the proverb. Those who wielded actual power with the people on a daily basis were the mandarins' subordinates: clerks and scribes, sheriffs and runners. In a position to bully and to squeeze, they were the most feared and hated members of the government: "Lawmen behaved that day as is their wont, / wreaking dire havoc just for money's sake" (lines 597–98). Rare were those underlings who would not abuse the authority delegated to them: "There was an elderly scrivener surnamed Chung, / a bureaucrat who somehow had a heart" (lines 607–08). In one scene Nguyễn Du shows how men who represented the law perverted it for their own selfish ends: "With cudgels under arm and swords in hand, / those fiends and monsters rushed around, berserk. / They cangued them both, the old man, his young son— / one cruel rope trussed two dear beings up. / Then, like bluebottles buzzing through the house, / they smashed workbaskets, shattered looms to bits. / They grabbed all jewels, fineries, personal things, / scooping the household clean to fill greed's bag" (lines 577–84); "Fear gripped the household—cries of innocence / shook up the earth, injustice dimmed the clouds. / All day they groveled, begged and prayed—deaf ears / would hear no plea, harsh hands would spare no blow. / A rope hung each from girders, by his heels— / rocks would have broken, let alone mere men. / Their faces spoke sheer pain and fright—this wrong / could they appeal to Heaven far away?" (lines 589–96).

What crime were the Vương father and son guilty of to call down such punishment? A laconic line mentions an unspecified charge brought by "some knave who sold raw silk" (line 588). The failure to give more precise details might be regarded as a lapse in narrative skill, but it points up the arbitrary nature of the arrest: on the flimsiest of grounds, lives and families could be wrecked at the whim of those in power.

For the three hundred liang (or taels) of silver needed to buy her

father's freedom, Kiều sells herself as a concubine to Scholar Mā, later revealed to be a pimp, and she is swept into a life of turpitude: she becomes a toy, an object dizzily spun by some occult force variously called the "blue potter's wheel" (*khuôn xanh*), the "sacred potter's wheel" (*khuôn thiêng*), and the "great potter's wheel" (*hỗn-quân*). Like Kiều, many people in an unjust society have been struck by "disasters that come flying on the wind," by inexplicable catastrophes, and they have empathized with her lot, feeling no reluctance to identify with a prostitute. If Confucian moralists condemn women who "deal in powder and sell perfume" (*buôn phấn bán hương*), the people take a kinder view of those who must "sell their rumps to feed their mouths" (*bán tròn nuôi miệng*). Prostitution is a temporary necessity from which a woman will escape at the first chance. According to a folk saying, "a whore works in nine places, but she saves one place to get a husband" (*làm dì chinh phuong, để một phuong lây chồng*). The ethical authority of marriage and the family is such that a man may "make a whore his wife, but no one should make his wife a whore" (*lây dì làm vợ, không ai lây vợ làm dì*). Kiều the prostitute conforms to that ingrained prejudice in favor of marriage and the family: she runs away with the cad Sô Khanh in hope that he will make an honest woman of her; she asks for a concubine's modest niche in young Thúc's home ("Should she, displeased, object and raise a storm, / tell her I know my place and honor hers"); she attains transient respectability as the consort of the rebel Tù Háí during his five-year period of victories; and in the end, she is reunited with Kim Trọng, who generously accepts her as a platonic bride. She expresses her gratitude to Kim in these terms: "If ever my soiled body's cleansed of stains, / I'll thank a gentleman, a noble soul / . . . / A home, a refuge—what won't you give me? / My honor lives again as of tonight" (lines 3181–86).

More sinned against than sinning, Kiều, as a folk symbol, stands for the victim's struggle to survive by drawing comfort and sustenance from a mixture of the popular belief in Heaven's will and the Buddhist concept of fate: "This we have learned: with Heaven rest all things. / Heaven appoints each human to a place. / If doomed to roll in dust, we'll roll in dust; / we'll sit on high when destined for high seats" (lines 3241–44) and "Our karma we must carry as our lot— / let's stop decrying Heaven's whims and quirks" (lines 3249–50). The idea of injustice, of wronged innocence, is so intolerable to sane minds that, in order to preserve their mental balance and endure, powerless

victims of either natural calamity or human wickedness must justify their misfortunes in some quasi-rational fashion. Many Vietnamese, like Kiều, have accepted the twin concepts of Heaven's will and of karma, or atonement for sins committed in an earlier existence. But fatalism, as a passive defense mechanism of individuals, denies the usefulness of any attempt to change the world, and it is this message within Nguyễn Du's poem that Marxist critics have quarreled with.

If the masses have found catharsis and solace in Kiều, members of the Vietnamese elite have looked upon her as their alter ego as well. It can even be claimed that in the plaintive voice of a girl sold into prostitution and slavery, Nguyễn Du himself airs personal discontents with his official career. At both the start and the finish of his tale he seems to hint at this purpose: "A hundred years—in this life span on earth / talent and destiny are apt to feud" (lines 1–2) and "In talent take no overweening pride, / for talent and disaster form a pair" (lines 3247–48). In classical literature, when talent is deplored as the target of ill fate, it belongs to a man rather than to a woman: "talent for men, beauty for women" (*trai tài gái sắc*).

The poem also contains a debate on women's chastity and fidelity. Toward the end of the story, when Kim urges Kiều to abide by her vow and marry him regardless of all that has happened to her, she answers: "A home where love and concord reign, / whose heart won't yearn for it? But I believe / that to her man a bride should bring the scent / of a close bud, the shape of a full moon. / It's priceless, chastity—by nuptial torch, / am I to blush for what I'll offer you?" (lines 3091–96) and "How dare I, boldfaced, soil with worldly filth / the homespun costume of a virtuous wife?" (lines 3103–04). But Kim will not yield to her line of reasoning and retorts: "How skilled you are in spinning words! / You have your reasons—others have their own. / Among those duties falling to her lot, / a woman's chastity means many things. / For there are times of ease and times of stress: / in crisis must one rigid rule apply? / True daughter, you upheld a woman's role: / what dust or dirt could ever sully you?" (lines 3113–20).

Such verbal give-and-take is reminiscent of an animal tale in verse, *Trinh Thủ* ("The Constant Mouse"), written by a Vietnamese scholar, presumably in the nineteenth century. It is about a she-mouse who, in the absence of her husband, resists the advances of a rat and refutes all his arguments against chastity and fidelity. If classical writers seem obsessed with the notion that women should

remain immaculate in thought and deed, a student of East Asian literature realizes that, more often than not, the issue serves as an allegory for a crucial problem in feudal times: political allegiance. For example, the T'ang poet Chang Chi (765–830) responded to overtures from the rebel Li Shih-tao with a poem entitled “Song of a Chaste Wife” (*Chieh fu yin*): “My lord, you knew I had a husband—/ yet you sent me two shiny pearls. / Affected by your loving thought, / I sewed them to my red gauze blouse. / My home stands tall near the Imperial Park. / My man bears arms and guards the Radiant Hall. / I know your pure heart glows like sun and moon—/ but to my man I'm pledged for life. / I give you back your pearls with my two tears. / Oh, why had you and I not met before?”

What we know of Nguyễn Du's life seems to confirm the suspicion that he saw himself as a political Kiều, a man forced to betray his loyalties and convictions by the duty to shield his family from harm. Although he belonged to a prominent Northern clan whose members had served the Lê sovereigns, the Trịnh lords, and the Tây-son rebels, he became a courtier in Huế, serving the Southern upstarts—the Nguyễn house. In 1802, with the help of French missionaries and mercenaries, Nguyễn Ánh emerged as the victor in a long civil war and, assuming Gia Long as his reign title, unified Vietnam. In all likelihood, the poet rallied to the winning side less from enthusiasm than from fear that his clan, badly compromised with Nguyễn Ánh's erstwhile enemies, might be persecuted. The theme of filial piety runs like a litany through his poem. Despite the prestige he enjoyed as a scholar and as a poet, Nguyễn Du's proud nature never adjusted to the stifling atmosphere of Huế, where a young, insecure dynasty ruthlessly crushed any sign of insubordination. It is reported that while he behaved humbly at court, he maintained a glum reserve and was afflicted with an incurable melancholia until his death. His secret wishes and dreams apparently flowed into the creation of the most astonishing character in his poem: Từ Hải.

In the original Chinese novel, Hsü Hai is little more than a bandit chief or warlord. Nguyễn Du's rebel, on the contrary, rises to epic heights—a hero *sans peur et sans reproche*, admired even by Hồ Tôn Hiển, who sets out to destroy him: “A tiger's beard, a swallow's jaw, and brows as thick as silkworms—he stood broad and tall. / A towering hero, he outfought all foes / with club or fist and knew all arts of war. / Between the earth and heaven he lived free” (lines 2167–71) and “Bamboos split fast; tiles slip, soon fall apart: / his

martial might now thundered far and wide. / In his own corner he installed his court / for peace or war and cut the realm in two. / Time after time he stormed across the land / and trampled down five strongholds in the South. / He fought and honed his sword on wind and dust, / scorning those racks for coats, those sacks for rice. / He stalked and swaggered through his border fief, / with no less stature than a prince, a king. / Who dared oppose his flag, dispute his sway? / For five years, by the sea, he reigned sole lord” (lines 2439–50).

When he is asked to trade his independence for a high post at court, Từ Hải's thoughts no doubt reflect Nguyễn Du's own loathing for a courtier's role: “My own two hands have built this realm—at will, / I've roamed the sea of Ch'u, the streams of Wu. / If I turn up at court, bound hand and foot, / what will become of me, surrendered man? / Why let them swaddle me in robes and skirts? / Why play a duke so as to cringe and crawl? / Had I not better rule my march-domain? / For what can they all do against my might? / At pleasure I stir heaven and shake earth— / I come and go, I bow my head to none” (lines 2463–72). But listening to Kiều's advice, Từ Hải surrenders and falls into an ambush. Great in life, he looms larger yet in death: “The fiercest tiger, taken unawares, / will lick the dust and meet an abject end. / Now doomed, Từ fought his own last fight on earth / to show them all a soldier's dauntless heart. / When his brave soul left him to join the gods, / he still stood on his feet amidst his foes. / His body, firm as rock and hard as bronze, / who in the whole wide world could shake or move?” (lines 2515–22).

In Confucian society, rebellion is the cardinal sin—yet here is a courtier singing a rebel's life in rapturous accents. If Nguyễn Du jettisoned the Chinese model of the original prose tale, neither did he create Từ Hải wholly out of his imagination. In the early part of the nineteenth century, Vietnam still echoed to a real-life epic—the meteoric career of Nguyễn Huệ. Flaunting his “cotton shirt and red flag” (*áo vải cờ đỏ*), he led the Tây-son revolt to one of the greatest triumphs in the history of peasant uprisings. He defeated the Trịnh lords in the north and the Nguyễn lords in the south, and in 1789 he launched a Tết or New Year's offensive to rout the two hundred thousand troops of the Chinese emperor Ch'ien-lung: “He beat the world / in wit and grit, shook heaven by sheer might” (lines 2903–04). His reign as Emperor Quang Trung was ephemeral, however: after his death in 1792 at the age of forty, the Tây-son dynasty fell apart.

Along with that of the heroine, Kiều, the portrait of Từ Hải,

inspired by a genuine folk hero, firmly fixes Nguyễn Du's tale in the Vietnamese people's affections. As emblematic figures that carry the hopes and dreams of the downtrodden, prostitute and rebel complement each other. If she personifies passive resistance to injustice and oppression, he embodies a man's ability to break through the evil system and take the law into his own hands, righting wrongs and rewarding virtues: the trial scene, where he lets her pay foes and friends their due wages, is a favorite with most Vietnamese.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the significance of Nguyễn Du's poem came to transcend both private anguish and popular identification. By an accident of history between East and West, the autobiography of a divided soul epitomized a moral dilemma that confronted all Vietnamese—scholars and intellectuals, in particular. After 1862, political allegiance became the paramount question as the Huế court, under military pressure, was forced to cede the three eastern provinces in the South to France. Phan Thanh Gián committed suicide after the further loss, in 1867, of the three western provinces entrusted to his care. The blind scholar-poet Nguyễn Đình Chiểu totally ignored the enemy, turning down offers of financial aid, refusing to wash with French-made soap or walk on French-built roads. Other scholars, like Tôn Thất Thuyết and Phan Dinh Phùng, organized resistance groups, which soon disintegrated in the face of superior military power. Less hardy spirits chose the safest course: they collaborated with the French occupation forces.

When scholars and intellectuals accept a foreign master and do his bidding, even for the sake of a mere livelihood, let alone wealth and rank, their behavior is properly called prostitution. In his controversy with Phan Văn Trị after 1862, the collaborationist Tôn Thọ Tường wrote a poem apologizing for his pro-French conduct and comparing his own plight to Kiều's—"when evil strikes, you bow to circumstance" (line 600). Like Nguyễn Du, Tường was never reconciled to what he did; toward the end of his life, in another poem, he likened himself to an old whore who had become a Buddhist nun and fasted for penance.

During the 1920s and 30s, a political debate revolved heatedly around *The Tale of Kiều*. The Director of Political Affairs for French Indochina, Louis Marty, appointed a brilliant scholar, Phạm Quỳnh, to preside over a cultural movement that would attract Vietnamese intellectuals and advance French interests. In many articles, the movement's chief organ, the monthly review *Nam Phong* ("South

Wind" or "Southern Ethos"), published a detailed study of Nguyễn Du's poem to prove that French rule and influence posed no permanent threat because, in Phạm Quỳnh's oft-quoted words, "as long as *The Tale of Kiều* lasts, our language will last; and as long as our language lasts, our country will last." Deliberately glossing over the ambiguities in Kiều's character, Phạm Quỳnh canonized her and proclaimed *The Tale of Kiều* a "pure" masterpiece, subtly suggesting that "pure" literary pursuit was a glorious (and profitable) alternative to politics or revolution.

Scholars who opposed the French control of their country, notably Ngô Đức Kế (1878–1929) and Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1876–1947), saw through Phạm Quỳnh's game and sought to denounce him. Under the watchful eyes of the secret police, they had to attack him on the sly. Suspecting that he cast himself in the role of Kiều, a filial Vietnamese who sold out to the colonialists for the fatherland's sake, they wrote satirical poems in which they savaged a certain "brothel": of course, their butt was the *Nam Phong* group, headed by Phạm Quỳnh, whom they regarded as a Scholar Má, a pimp, not as a whore with a heart of gold. Mostly, they reviled Nguyễn Du's masterpiece, calling it poisonous trash and its heroine a depraved sinner. Because Phạm Quỳnh had preempted one end of the critical spectrum, they went to the other extreme to dramatize their hostility toward someone they considered the most dangerous henchman of French imperialism: if *The Tale of Kiều* meant everything to a traitor, then it meant nothing, or worse than nothing, to patriots.

In the last third of the twentieth century, Vietnam was once again forced to "go through a play of ebb and flow / and watch such things as make you sick at heart." Thoughtful Vietnamese cannot help recognizing in their country the image of a karma-cursed woman: Kiều. Between 1965 and 1975, the Washington crusade for a world safe from Soviet Russia and Red China tore asunder the warp and woof of society in South Vietnam and bred prostitution, sexual and otherwise, on a vast scale. Unseen, unheard B-52 bombers that rained death and destruction out of the blue gave a new meaning to the phrase "disasters that come flying on the wind." The United States government intervened in the belief that the wealthiest power on earth, boasting the most advanced knowledge of warfare, simply could not lose. But Nguyễn Du says: "In talent take no overweening pride, / for talent and disaster form a pair." The Americans proceeded to prove the poet's point: they visited untold harm on those

they meant to rescue from communism while inflicting serious damage on themselves as well.

After the collapse of South Vietnam and the communist conquest in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese have fled from their homeland and now live in exile, scattered over various parts of the globe. Often psychologically and socially estranged from a host country whose language they do not understand, many derive spiritual comfort from Nguyễn Du's masterpiece. They know most of its lines by heart, and when they recite them out loud, they speak their mother tongue at its finest. To the extent that the poem implies something at the very core of Vietnamese experience, it addresses them intimately as victims, as refugees, as survivors. In the course of Vietnam's tormented history, the individual, like Kiều herself, has all too often become the toy of necessity, has been compelled to do the bidding of some alien power, to serve a master other than the one to whom he or she should owe allegiance. Beyond its literal meaning, Kiều's prostitution is interpreted as a metaphor for the betrayal of principle under duress, the submission to force of circumstances. More generally, Kiều stands for Vietnam itself, a land well endowed with natural and human resources, but too often doomed to see such riches gone to waste or destroyed. And yet, despite its grim details and sordid aspects, Kiều's story conveys a message of hope for both the individual and the country: if, like Kiều, the Vietnamese accept and endure with fortitude whatever happens to them, someday they will have paid the cost of their evil karma and will achieve both personal and national salvation.



# TRUYỆN KIÊU

Lạ gi thanh-khi lê hằng,  
một dây một buộc ai giằng cho ra.

# THE TALE OF KIÊU

*Of course, when two kin spirits meet, one tie  
soon binds them in a knot none can yank loose.*

Trăm năm trong cõi người ta,  
chữ tài chữ mệnh khéo là ghét nhau.

Trái qua một cuộc bể-dâu,  
những diễu trông thấy mà đau-dòn lòng.

Lạ gi bí sắc tư phong?  
Trời xanh quen thói mà hông đánh ghen.

Cáo thơm lẩn giờ trước đèn,  
phong-tinh cõi-lục còn truyền sử xanh.

Rảng năm Gia-tình triều Minh,  
bồn phuong phẳng-lặng hai kinh vững-vàng.

Có nhà viên-ngoại họ Vương,  
gia-tư nghỉ cùng thường-thường bậc trung.

Một trai con thứ rốt lòng,  
Vương Quan là chữ nỗi dòng nho-gia.

Đầu lòng hai á tõ-nga,  
Thúy Kiều là chị em là Thúy Vân.

Mai cõt-cách tuyêt tinh-thần,  
mỗi người một vẻ mười phân vẹn mười.

Vân xem trang-trọng khác vời:  
khuôn trang dầy-dặn nét ngài nở-nang;  
hoa cười ngọc thốt doan-trang,  
mây thua nước tóc tuyêt nhường màu da.

Kiều càng sắc-sảo mặn-mà,  
so bẽ tài sắc lại là phần hơn.

Làn thu-thúy nét xuân-son,  
hoa ghen thua thắm liễu hèn xanh.

Một hai nghiêng nước nghiêng thành,  
sắc đành đòi một tài đành họa hai.

Thông-minh vốn sẵn tư trời,  
pha nghệ thi họa đú mùi ca ngâm.

Cung-thương lâu bậc ngũ-âm,  
nghệ riêng ăn đứt hổ-cẩm Ngại Trương.

Khúc nhà tay lụa nên chuong,  
một thiền Bạc-Mệnh lại càng não nhán.

Phong-lưu rất mực hồng-quắn,  
xuân xanh xấp-xỉ tới tuấn cắp-kê.

5

A hundred years—in this life span on earth  
talent and destiny are apt to feud.

You must go through a play of ebb and flow\*  
and watch such things as make you sick at heart.  
Is it so strange that losses balance gains?\*  
Blue Heaven's wont to strike a rose from spite.\*

10

By lamplight turn these scented leaves and read  
a tale of love recorded in old books.\*  
Under the Chia-ching reign when Ming held sway,\*  
all lived at peace—both capitals stood strong.\*

10

There was a burgher in the clan of Vương,\*  
a man of modest wealth and middle rank.  
He had a last-born son, Vương Quan—his hope\*  
to carry on a line of learned folk.  
Two daughters, beauties both, had come before:  
Thúy Kiều was oldest, younger was Thúy Vân.\*  
Bodies like slim plum branches, snow-pure souls:  
each her own self, each perfect in her way.

15

In quiet grace Vân was beyond compare:  
her face a moon, her eyebrows two full curves;  
her smile a flower, her voice the song of jade;  
her hair the sheen of clouds, her skin white snow.

20

Yet Kiều possessed a keener, deeper charm,  
surpassing Vân in talents and in looks.  
Her eyes were autumn streams, her brows spring hills.  
Flowers grudged her glamour, willows her fresh hue.

25

A glance or two from her, and kingdoms rocked!\*

Supreme in looks, she had few peers in gifts.  
By Heaven blessed with wit, she knew all skills:  
she could write verse and paint, could sing and chant.

30

Of music she had mastered all five tones\*  
and played the lute far better than Ai Chang.\*  
She had composed a song called *Cruel Fate*\*  
to mourn all women in soul-rending strains.

35

A paragon of grace for womanhood,\*  
she neared that time when maidens pinned their hair.\*

5

10

15

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30

35

\*An asterisk indicates that the notes contain explanation or comment on the line(s).

Em-dêm trường rủ màn che,  
tường đông ong-bướm đi về mặc ai.

Ngày xuân con én dưa thoι,  
thiếu-quang chín chục dã ngoài sáu mươi.

40

Cỏ non xanh tận chân trời,  
cành lê trắng điểm một vài bông hoa.

Thanh-minh trong tiết tháng ba,  
lẽ là táo-mộ hội là đạp-thanh.

45

Gần xa nô-nức yền-anh,  
chị-em sám-sứa bộ-hành chơi xuân.

Dập-diệu tài-tử giai-nhân,  
ngựa-xe như nước áo-quần như nen.

50

Ngõn-ngang gò-dồng kéo lên,  
thoi vắng vỏ rắc tro tiễn giãy bay.

Tà-tà bóng ngã về tây,  
chị-em thơ-thẩn dan tay ra về.

55

Bước dần theo ngọn tiêu-khê,  
lần xem phong-cánh có bẽ thanh-thanh.

Nao-nao dòng nước uốn quanh,  
nhịp cầu nho-nhỏ cuỗi ghênh bắc ngang.

55

Sè-sè năm đất bên đường,  
dầu-dầu ngọn cỏ nứa vàng nứa xanh.

Rằng: "Sao trong tiết Thanh-minh  
mà dây hương-khói vàng tanh thè mà?"

60

Vương Quan mới dẫn gần xa:  
"Đam Tiên nàng ấy xưa là ca-nhi.

"Nội danh tài sắc một thi,  
xôn-xao ngoài cửa hiềm gì yền-anh.

65

"Kiếp hồng-nhan có mong-manh,  
nhra chừng xuân thoát gãy cánh thiên-hương.

"Có người khách ở viễn-phương,  
xa nghe cùng nức tiếng nàng tìm chơi.

70

"Thuyền tình vừa ghé tới nơi,  
thì đã trảm gãy bình rơi bao giờ.

"Buồng không lặng ngắt như tờ,  
dầu xe-ngựa đã rêu lờ-mờ xanh.

75

"Khóc-than khôn xiết sự-tinh:  
"Khéo vô-duyên bầy là mình với ta!

"Đã không duyên trước chặng mà,

She calmly lived behind drawn shades and drapes,  
as wooers swarmed, unheeded, by the wall.\*

Swift swallows and spring days were shuttling by—  
of ninety radiant ones three score had fled.

40

Young grass spread all its green to heaven's rim;  
some blossoms marked pear branches with white dots.  
Now came the Feast of Light in the third month\*  
with graveyard rites and junkets on the green.  
As merry pilgrims flocked from near and far,\*  
the sisters and their brother went for a stroll.

45

Fine men and beauteous women on parade:  
a crush of clothes, a rush of wheels and steeds.\*  
Folks clambered burial knolls to strew and burn  
sham gold or paper coins, and ashes swirled.

50

Now, as the sun was dipping toward the west,  
the youngsters started homeward, hand in hand.  
With leisured steps they walked along a brook,  
admiring here and there a pretty view.

55

The rivulet, babbling, curled and wound its course  
under a bridge that spanned it farther down.  
Beside the road a mound of earth loomed up  
where withered weeds, half yellow and half green.

Kiều asked: "Now that the Feast of Light is on,  
why is no incense burning for this grave?"

60

Vương Quan told her this tale from first to last:  
"She was a famous singer once, Đam Tiên.\*

Renowned for looks and talents in her day,  
she lacked not lovers jostling at her door.\*  
But fate makes roses fragile—in mid-spring\*  
off broke the flower that breathed forth heaven's scents.

65

From overseas a stranger came to woo  
and win a girl whose name spread far and wide.

70

But when the lover's boat sailed into port,  
he found the pin had snapped, the vase had crashed.\*  
A death-still silence filled the void, her room;\*  
all tracks of horse or wheels had blurred to moss.

He wept, full of a grief no words could tell:  
'Harsh is the fate that has kept us apart!  
Since in this life we are not meant to meet,

75

"thì chi chút ước gọi là duyên sau."	
"Sắm-sanh nèp từ xe châu, "bụi hồng một năm mặc dầu cỏ-hoa.	
"Trái bao thó lặn ác tà, "ăy mồ vò-chú ai mà viêng-thăm."	80
Lòng đâu sẵn mõi thương-tâm, thoát nghe Kiều đã đầm-đầm cháu sa:	
"Đau-dớn thay phận đàn bà! "Lời rằng bạc-mệnh cũng là lời chung.	
"Phù-phàng chỉ bầy hỏa-công, "ngày xanh mòn-mòn má hồng phôi-pha.	85
"Sông làm vợ khắp người ta, "hại thay thác xuồng làm ma không chồng!	
"Nào người phượng chà loan chung? "Nào người tiếc lục tham hồng là ai?	
"Đã không kẻ đoái người hoài, "sẵn dây ta thắp một vài nén hương.	90
"Gọi là gấp-gỡ giữa đường, "họa là người dưới suối vàng biết cho."	
Lầm-rầm khăn-khứa nhô to, sụp ngồi và gật trước mồ bước ra.	95
Một vùng cỏ áy bóng tà, gió hiu-hiu thổi một và bông lau.	
Rút trâm sẵn giắt mái đầu, vạch da cây vịnh bồn câu ba vấn.	100
Lại càng mê-mẩn tâm-thần, lại càng đứng lặng tần-ngần chẳng ra.	
Lại càng ủ-dột nét hoa, sầu tuôn đứt nỗi cháu sa vấn dài.	105
Vân rằng: "Chị cùng nực cười, "khéo du nước mắt khóc người đời xưa!"	
Rắng: "Hồng-nhan tự thuở xưa, "cái diều bạc-mệnh có chừa ai đau.	
"Nỗi-niềm tưởng đèn mà đau, "thầy người nằm đó biết sau thề nào."	110
Quan rằng: "Chị nói hay sao! "Một lời là một vận vào khó nghe.	
"Ở đây âm-khi nặng-nẽ, "bóng chiếu đã ngã dậm về cõi xa."	
Kiều rằng: "Những đằng tài-hoa,	115

let me pledge you my troth for our next life.* He purchased both a coffin and a hearse* and rested her in dust beneath this mound,* among the grass and flowers. For many moons,* who's come to tend a grave that no one claims?"	80
A well of pity lay within Kiều's heart: as soon as she had heard her tears burst forth.* "How sorrowful is women's lot!" she cried. "We all partake of woe, our common fate. Creator, why are you so mean and cruel, blighting green days and fading rose-fresh cheeks?** Alive, she played the wife to all the world, alas, to end down there without a man! Where are they now who shared in her embrace?** Where are they now who lusted for her charms?**	85
Since no one else gives her a glance, a thought, I'll light some incense candles while I'm here. I'll mark our chance encounter on the road— perhaps, down by the Yellow Springs, she'll know."*	90
She prayed in mumbled tones, then she knelt down to make a few low bows before the tomb. Dusk-gathered on a patch of wilted weeds— reed tassels swayed as gently blew the breeze. She pulled a pin out of her hair and graved four lines of stop-short verse on a tree's bark.* Deeper and deeper sank her soul in trance— all hushed, she tarried there and would not leave. The cloud on her fair face grew darker yet: as sorrow ebbed or flowed, tears dropped or streamed.	95
Vân said: "My sister, you should be laughed at, lavishing tears on one long dead and gone!" "Since ages out of mind," retorted Kiều, "harsh fate has cursed all women, sparing none.* As I see her lie there, it hurts to think what will become of me in later days."	100
"A fine speech you just made!" protested Quan. "It jars the ears to hear you speak of her and mean yourself. Dank air hangs heavy here— day's failing, and there's still a long way home."	105
Kiều said: "When one who shines in talent dies,	110
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"thác là thê-phách còn là tinh-anh.

"Đè hay tinh lại gặp tinh,  
chờ xem át thầy hiền-linh bảy giờ."

Một lời nói chưa kịp thưa,  
phút đầu trận gió cuốn cờ đèn ngay.

Ào-ào đỗ lộc rung cây,  
ở trong đường có hương bay ít nhiều.

Đè chừng ngọn gió lấn theo,  
dầu giày từng bước in rêu ránh-ránh.

Mặt nhìn ai nấy đều kinh.

Nàng rằng: "Này thật tinh-thanh chẳng xa!

"Hữu-tinh ta lại gặp ta,  
chờ nê u-hiên mới là chị-em."

Đã lòng hiền-hiên cho xem,  
tạ lòng nàng lại nỗi thêm vài lời.

Lòng thơ lai-láng bối-hối,  
gốc cây lại vạch một bài cõ-thi.

Dùng-dàng nứa ở nứa vẽ,  
nhạc vang đâu dà tiếng nghe gần-gần.

Trông chừng thấy một vân-nhân,  
lòng buông tay khâu bước lẩn dẩn băng.

Đè-huê lưng túi gió-trăng,  
sau chân theo một vài thằng con-con.

Tuyệt in sắc ngựa cầu giòn,  
cố pha màu áo nhuộm non da trời.

Néo xa mới tỏ mặt người,  
khách dà xuồng ngựa tới nơi tự-tinh.

Hải văn lẩn bước dặm xanh,  
một vùng như thế cây quỳnh cảnh dao.

Chàng Vương quen mắt ra chào,  
hai kiều e-lệ nép vào dưới hoa.

Nguyên người quanh-quật đâu xa,  
họ Kim tên Trọng vốn nhà trâm-anh.

Nền phú-hậu bậc tài-danh,  
vân-chương nết đất thông-minh tinh trời.

Phong-tư tài-mạo tót vời,  
vào trong phong-nhà ra ngoài hào-hoa.

Chung-quanh vẫn đất-nước nhả,  
với Vương Quan trước vốn là đồng-thân.

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the body passes on, the soul remains.

In her, perhaps, I've found a kindred heart:  
let's wait and soon enough she may appear."

Before they could respond to what Kiều said,  
a whirlwind rose from nowhere, raged and raved.  
It blustered, strewing buds and shaking trees  
and scattering whiffs of perfume in the air.

They strode along the path the whirlwind took  
and plainly saw fresh footprints on the moss.  
They stared at one another, terror-struck.  
"You've heard the prayer of my pure faith!" Kiều cried.  
"As kindred hearts, we've joined each other here—  
transcending life and death, soul sisters meet."

Đạm Tiên had cared to manifest herself:  
to what she'd written Kiều now added thanks.  
A poet's feelings, rife with anguish, flowed:  
she carved an old-style poem on the tree.\*

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To leave or stay—they all were wavering still\*  
when nearby rang the sound of harness bells.

They saw a youthful scholar come their way  
astride a colt he rode with slackened rein.

He carried poems packing half his bag,\*  
and tagging at his heels were some page boys.  
His frisky horse's coat was dyed with snow.

His gown blent tints of grass and pale blue sky.

He spied them from afar, at once alit  
and walked toward them to pay them his respects.  
His figured slippers trod the green—the field  
now sparkled like some jade-and-ruby grove.\*

Young Vương stepped forth and greeted him he knew  
while two shy maidens hid behind the flowers.

He came from somewhere not so far away,  
Kim Trọng, a scion of the noblest stock.\*

Born into wealth and talent, he'd received  
his wit from heaven, a scholar's trade from men.

Manner and mien set him above the crowd:  
he studied books indoors, lived high abroad.  
Since birth he'd always called this region home—  
he and young Vương were classmates at their school.

Trộm nghe thơm nức hương-lân,  
một nến Đống-tước khóa xuân hai Kiều.

Nước-non cách mây buồng thêu,  
nhưng là trộm dẫu thầm yêu chóc-mòng.

May thay giải-cầu tương-phùng,  
gặp tuần đỗ là thỏa lòng tim hoa.

Bóng hồng nhác thầy néo xa,  
xuân-lan thu-cúc mặn-mà cả hai.

Người quoc-sắc kè thiên-tài,  
tinh trong như dã mặt ngoài cỏ e.

Chập-chờn cơn tính cơn mê,  
rõn ngõi chẳng tiện dứt về chín khôn.

Bóng tà như giục cơn buồn,  
khách dà lên ngựa người còn ghé theo.

Dưới dòng nước chảy trong veo,  
bên cầu tơ liễu bóng chiếu thướt-tha.

Kiều từ trở gót trường hoa,  
mặt trời gác núi chiêng đà thu-không.

Gương nga chênh-chêch dòm song,  
vàng gieo ngắn nước cây lồng bóng sân.

Hải-đường lá ngọn đồng-lân,  
giọt sương gieo nặng cánh xuân la-dà.

Một mình lặng ngắm bóng nga,  
rộn đường gần với nỗi xa bời-bời;

“Người mà dẽn thè thì thôi,  
đời phồn-hoa cùng là đời bó đi!

“Người đâu gặp-gỡ làm chi,  
trăm năm biết có duyên gì hay không?”

Ngôn-ngang trâm mồi bên lóng,  
nên câu tuyệt-diệu ngụ trong tinh-tinh.

Chênh-chênh bóng nguyệt xè mành,  
tựa ngõi bên triện một minh thu-thiu.

Thoát đâu thầy một tiêu-kiều,  
cò chiếu phong-vận cò chiếu thanh-tân.

Sương in mật tuyết pha thân,  
sen vàng lâng-dâng như gần như xa.

Rước mừng đón hỏi dò-la:  
“Đào-nguyên lạc lôi đâu mà dẽn đây?”  
Thưa rằng: “Thanh-khí xưa nay,

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His neighbors' fame had spread and reached his ear:  
two beauties locked in their Bronze Sparrow Tower!\*  
But, as if hills and streams had barred the way,  
he had long sighed and dreamt of them, in vain.  
How lucky, in this season of new leaves,\*  
to roam about and find his yearned-for flowers!  
He caught a fleeting glimpse of both afar:\*

spring orchid, autumn mum—a gorgeous pair!

Beautiful girl and talented young man—  
what stirred their hearts their eyes still dared not say.  
They hovered, rapture-bound, 'tween wake and dream:  
they could not stay, nor would they soon depart.  
The dusk of sunset prompted thoughts of gloom—  
he left, and longingly she watched him go.  
Below a stream flowed clear, and by the bridge  
a twilit willow rustled threads of silk.

When Kiều got back behind her flowered drapes,  
the sun had set, the curfew gong had rung.  
Outside the window, squinting, peeped the moon—  
gold spilled on waves, trees shadowed all the yard.  
East drooped a red camellia, toward the next house:\*

as dewdrops fell, the spring branch bent and bowed.

Alone, in silence, she beheld the moon,\*  
her heart a raveled coil of hopes and fears:  
“Lower than that no person could be brought!  
It's just a bauble then, the glittering life.  
And who is he? Why did we chance to meet?  
Does fate intend some tie between us two?”  
Her bosom heaved in turmoil—she poured forth  
a wondrous lyric fraught with all she felt.

The moonlight through the blinds was falling slant.  
Leaning against the window, she drowsed off.  
Now out of nowhere there appeared a girl  
of worldly glamour joined to virgin grace:  
face washed with dewdrops, body clad in snow,  
and hovering feet, two golden lotus blooms.\*

With joy Kiều hailed the stranger, asking her:  
“Did you stray here from that Peach Blossom Spring?”\*  
“We two are sister souls,” the other said.\*

"mời cùng nhau lúc ban ngày đã quên? "Hàn-gia ở mẽ tây-thiên, "dưới dòng nước cháy bên trên có cầu. "Mây lồng hạ-cõ đèn nhau, "mây lời hạ-tứ ném châu gieo vàng. "Vàng trinh Hội-chú xem thường, "mà sao trong Số Đoan-Trường có tên. "Âu dành quá-kiếp nhân-duyên, cùng người một hội một thuyền dâu xa! "Này mười bài mới mòi ra, câu thần lại mượn bút hoa vè-vời." Kiều vắng lánh ý để bài, tay tiên một vẩy đù mười khúc ngâm. Xem thơ nắc-nở khen thẩm: "Giá dành tú khâu cầm tâm khác thường! "Ví đem vào Tập Đoan-Trường, "thì treo giải nhất chi nhường cho ai!" Thêm hoa khách đã trớ hải, nàng còn cầm lại một hai tự-tinh. Gió dâu sitch bức mảnh-mảnh, tỉnh ra mới biết rằng mình chiêm-bao. Trông theo nào thấy đâu nào, hương thừa đường hây ra vào đâu đây. Một mình lường-lự canh chầy, đường xa nghĩ nỗi sau này mà kinh. Hoa trôi bèo giạt đã dành, biết duyên mình biết phận mình thè thôi. Nỗi riêng lớp lớp sóng dối, nghỉ đòi cơn lại sụt-sùi đòi cơn. Giọng Kiều rền-rì trướng loan. Nhà huyên chợt tỉnh hỏi: "Cơn-cớ gì? "Cớ sao trần-trọc canh khuya, "màu hoa lê hây dẩm-dể giọt mưa?" Thưa rằng: "Chút phận ngây-thơ, "đường sinh đôi nợ tóc-tơ chưa dễn. "Buổi ngày chơi má Đạm Tiên, "nhấp đi thoát thấy ưng liền chiêm-bao. "Đoan-trường là số thè nào, "bái ra thè ấy vịnh vào thè kia. "Cứ trong mộng-trieu mà suy,	195 200 205 210 215 220 225 230
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"Have you forgotten? We just met today! My cold abode lies west of here, out there, above a running brook, below a bridge. By pity moved, you stooped to notice me and strew on me poetic pearls and gems. I showed them to our League Chief and was told* your name is marked in the Book of the Damned.* We both reap what we sowed in our past lives: of the same League, we ride the selfsame boat. Well, ten new subjects our League Chief just set: again please work your magic with a brush."	195 200 205 210 215 220 225 230
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Kiều did as asked and wrote—with nymphic grace  
her hand dashed off ten lyrics at one stroke.  
Đạm Tiên read them and marveled to herself:  
"Rich-wrought embroidery from a heart of gold!  
Included in the Book of Sorrow Songs,\*  
they'll yield the palm to none but win first prize."

The caller crossed the doorsill, turned to leave,  
but Kiều would hold her back and talk some more.  
A sudden gust of wind disturbed the blinds,  
and Kiều awakened, knowing she had dreamed.  
She looked, but nowhere could she see the girl,  
though hints of perfume lingered here and there.

Alone with her dilemma in deep night,  
she viewed the road ahead and dread seized her.  
A rose afloat, a water fern adrift:  
such was the lot her future held in store.  
Her inmost feelings surged, wave after wave—  
again and yet again she broke and cried.

Kiều's sobs sent echoes through the phoenix drapes.  
Aroused, her mother asked: "What troubles you\*  
that you still stir and fret at dead of night,  
your cheeks like some pear blossoms drenched with rain?" \*  
Kiều said: "You once bore me, you've brought me up,  
a double debt I've not repaid one whit.  
Today, while strolling, I found Đạm Tiên's grave,  
then in a dream she just revealed herself.  
She told me how by fate I'm doomed to grief,  
delivered themes on which I wrote some songs.  
As I interpret what the dream portends,

"phận con thôi có ra gì mai sau!"

Dạy rằng: "Mộng-huyễn chắc đâu,  
"bỗng không mua nào chắc sâu ngùi nào!"

Vâng lời khuyên-giải thấp cao,  
chưa xong điêu ngùi đã dào mạch Tương.

Ngoài song thô-thé oanh vàng,  
nách tường bông liễu bay sang láng-giêng.

Hiên tà gác bóng nghiêng-nghiêng,  
nỗi riêng riêng chạnh tặc riêng một mình.

Cho hay là giõng hữu-tình,  
đỗ ai gờ mỗi tơ mảnh cho xong.

Chảng Kim từ lại thư-song,  
nỗi nàng canh-cánh bên lòng biẽng khuây.

Sầu đọng càng lắc càng đẩy,  
ba thu dồn lại một ngày dài ghê.

Mây Tân khóa kin song the,  
bóng hồng liệu néo di vể chiêm-bao.

Tuần trāng khuyết đĩa dầu hao,  
mát mơ-tường mặt lòng ngao-ngán lòng.

Buồng vân hơi giá như đồng,  
trúc se ngọn thó tơ chùng phim loan.

Mảnh Tương phân-phát gió đàn,  
hương gây mùi nhớ trà khan giọng tình.

Vì chảng duyên-nợ ba sinh,  
làm chi đem thói khuynh-thành trêu người.

Bâng-khuâng nhớ cánh nhớ người,  
nhớ nơi kỳ-ngộ vội dời chân đi.

Một vùng cỏ mọc xanh ri,  
nước ngâm trong vắt thấy gì nữa đâu.

Gió chiều như giục cơn sầu,  
vi-lô hiu-hắt như màu khẩy-trêu.

Nghẽ riêng nhớ ít tướng nhiều,  
xăm-xăm dè néo Lam-kiều lẩn sang.

Thâm-nghiêm kin công cao tường,  
cạn dòng lá thâm dứt đường chim xanh.

Lợ-thợ tơ liễu buồng mảnh,  
con oanh học nói trên cành mia-mai.

Mây lẩn cùa đóng then cài,  
dãy thềm hoa rụng biết người ở đâu?

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my life in days ahead won't come to much!"

Her mother said: "Are dreams and vapors grounds  
whereon to build a tale of woe? Just think!"

Kiều tried to heed such words of sound advice,  
but soon her tears welled up and flowed again.\*  
Outside the window chirped an oriole—  
over the wall a catkin flew next door.\*  
The tilting moonlight lay aslant the porch—  
she stayed alone, alone with her own grief.

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How strange, the race of lovers! Try as you will,\*  
you can't unsnarl their hearts' entangled threads.

Since Kim was back inside his book-lined walls,  
he could not drive her from his haunted mind.

He drained the cup of gloom: it filled anew—  
one day without her seemed three autumns long.  
Silk curtains veiled her windows like dense clouds,  
and toward the rose within he'd dream his way.

The moon kept waning, oil kept burning low:  
his face yearned for her face, his heart her heart.  
The study-room turned icy, metal-cold—\*  
brushes lay dry, lute strings hung loose on frets.

Hsiang bamboo blinds stirred rustling in the wind—\*  
incense roused longing, tea lacked love's sweet taste.  
If fate did not mean them to join as mates,\*  
why had the temptress come and teased his eyes?\*

Forlorn, he missed the scene, he missed the girl:  
he rushed back where by chance the two had met.

A tract of land with grasses lush and green,  
with waters crystal-clear: he saw naught else.  
The breeze at twilight stirred a mood of grief—  
the reeds waved back and forth as if to taunt.

A lover's mind is full of her he loves:  
he walked straight on and made toward her Blue Bridge.\*

Fast gate, high wall: no stream for his red leaf,\*  
no passage for his bluebird bearing word.\*  
A willow dropped its curtain of silk threads—  
perched on a branch, an oriole chirped jeers.

All doors were shut, all bolts were locked in place.  
A threshold strewn with flowers—where was she?

Tần-ngắn đứng suốt giờ lâu, đạo quanh chờ thây mé sau cổ nhà. Là nhà Ngô-Việt thương-gia, buồng không để dò người xa chưa về. Lấy điếu du-học hỏi thuê, túi đan cắp sách để-huê dọn sang. Có cây có đá sẵn-sàng, có hiên Lâm-thúy nét vàng chưa phai. Mừng thăm chồn ày chữ bài: "Ba sinh âu hán duyên trời chi đây!" Song hổ nứa khép cánh mày, tường đông ghé mắt ngày ngày hảng trông. Tắc-gang động khóa nguồn phong, tịt-mù nào thây bóng hống vào ra. Nhẫn từ quán khách lân-la, tuấn trăng thâm-thoắt nay dà thèm hai. Cách tường phái buổi êm trời, dưới đào dường có bóng người thướt-tha. Buông cầm xốc áo vội ra, hương còn thơm nức người dà váng tanh. Lần theo tường gầm đạo quanh, trên đào nhác thây một cảnh kim-thoa. Giơ tay với lấy về nhà: "Này trong khẽ-các dâu mà đèn đây? "Gầm âu người ày báu này. "Chẳng duyên chưa dẽ vào tay ai cầm." Liền tay ngắm-nghĩa biêng nǎm, hay còn thoang-thoảng hương trầm chưa phai. Tan sương dà thây bóng người, quanh tường ra ý tim-tỏi ngắn-ngo. Sinh dà có ý đợi-chờ, cách tường lên tiếng xa đưa ướm lòng: "Thoa này bắt được hư-không, biết đâu Hợp-phố mà mong chầu vè?" Tiếng Kiều nghe lọt bên kia: "Ôn lòng quân-tử sá gì của rơi. "Chiếc thoa nào của mây mươi, mà lòng trọng nghĩa khinh tài xiết bao!" Sinh rằng: "Lân-lý ra vào, gắn dây nào phải người nào xa-xôi.	275 280 285 290 295 300 305 310
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He lingered, standing there as time passed by, then to the rear he strolled—he saw a house. Its owner, traveling heathen climes for trade,* was still away—left vacant were the rooms. Young Kim, as student, came to rent the house— he brought his lute, his books, and settled in. He lacked for nothing—trees and rocks, a porch inscribed in vivid gold: "Kingfisher View." * The porch's name made him exult inside: "It must be Heaven's will that we should meet!" * He left his window open just a crack and daily glanced his eyes toward that east wall.* Nearby both spring and grotto stayed tight shut: he failed to see the nymph flit in and out.* Since he left home to dwell at this strange lodge, twice on its rounds the moon had come and gone. Now, on a balmy day, across the wall, he glimpsed a lissome form beneath peach trees. He dropped the lute, smoothed down his gown, rushed out: her scent was wafting still—of her no trace. As he paced round the wall, his eye espied a golden hairpin caught on a peach branch. He reached for it and took it home. He thought: "It left a woman's chamber and came here. This jewel must be hers. Why, fate binds us— if not, could it have fallen in my hands?" Now sleepless, he admired and stroked the pin still faintly redolent of sandalwood.	275 280 285 290 295 300 305 310
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At dawn when mists had cleared, he found the girl  
peering along the wall with puzzled eyes.  
The student had been lurking there in wait—  
across the wall he spoke to test her heart:  
"From nowhere I have found this hairpin here:  
I would send back the pearl, but where's Ho-p'u?" \*

Now from the other side Kiều's voice was heard:  
"I thank him who won't keep a jewel found.  
A pin's worth little, but it means so much  
that in your scale what's right weighs more than gold."

He said: "We come and go in these same parts—  
we're neighbors, not two strangers, not at all!"

- "Được rày nhở chút thơm rơi,  
"kè dà thiêu-nào lòng người bãy nay!  
"Bãy lâu mới được một ngày,  
"dừng chân gần chút niêm tây gọi là."  
    Vội vã thêm lầy của nhà,  
xuyên vàng đôi chiếc khăn là một vuông.  
    Bát mây rón bước ngọn tường,  
phái người hôm nọ rồ-ràng chảng nhẹ.  
    Sương-sùng giữ ý rụt-rè,  
ké nhìn rõ mặt người e cúi đầu.  
    Rắng: "Từ ngẫu-nhì gặp nhau,  
"thẩm trông trộm nhớ bãy lâu đã chốn.  
    "Xương mai tính đã rù-mòn,  
"lẩn-lùa ai biết hãy còn hôm nay.  
    "Tháng tròn như gửi cung mây,  
"trần-trần một phận ấp cây dà liễu.  
    "Tiện dây xin một hai điếu,  
"đài gương soi đèn dầu bèo cho chàng?"  
    Ngẩn-ngứ nàng mới thưa rằng:  
"Thôi nhà băng-tuyệt chât hằng phi-phong.  
    "Dầu khi lá thẩm chí hồng,  
"nên chàng thi cũng tại lòng mẹ-cha.  
    "Nặng lòng xót liễu vì hoa,  
"trè-thơ dà biết đâu mà dám thưa."  
    Sinh rằng: "Rày gió mai mưa,  
"ngày xuân dà dẽ tình-cờ mẩy khí.  
    "Dầu chàng xét tâm tình si,  
"thiệt đây mà có ích gì đèn ai?  
    "Chút chi gắn-bó một hai,  
"cho dành rồi sẽ liệu bài mồi-manh.  
    "Khuôn thiêng dầu phụ tắc thành,  
"cùng liễu bô quả xuân xanh một đời.  
    "Lượng xuân dầu quyết hép-hòi,  
"công deo-duối chàng thiệt-thời lầm ru!"  
    Lặng nghe lời nói như ru,  
chiều xuân dẽ khiền nét thu ngại-ngùng.  
    Rắng: "Trong buổi mới lả-lùng,  
"nè lòng cõi lè cầm lòng cho đang.  
    "Đã lòng quản-tử da-mang,  
"một lời vang tạc đá-vàng thủy-chung."

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- I owe this moment to some scent you dropped,  
but countless torments I've endured till now.  
So long I've waited for just this one day!  
Stay on and let me ask your private thoughts."  
    He hurried off and fetched some things from home:  
gold bracelets in a pair, a scarf of silk.  
By ladder he could climb across the wall:  
she was the one he'd met that day, no doubt!  
Ashamed, the girl maintained a shy reserve:  
while he gazed at her face, she hung her head.  
    He said: "We chanced to meet—and ever since  
I have in secret yearned and pined for you.  
My slender frame has wasted—who'd have thought  
that I could linger on to see this day?  
For months I dreamt my goddess in the clouds;\*  
lovelorn, I hugged my post, prepared to drown.\*  
But you are here—I beg to ask one thing:  
will on a leaf of grass the mirror shine?"\*  
    She faltered—after some demur she said:  
"Our ways are snow-pure, plain as turnip greens.  
When comes the time for love, the marriage bond,\*  
my parents' wish will tie it or will not.  
You deign to care for me, but I'm too young  
to know what's right and dare not give my word."  
    He said: "It blows one day and rains the next—  
how often does chance favor us in spring?  
If you ignore and scorn my desperate love,  
you'll hurt me—yet what will it profit you?  
Let's pledge our troth with something—once that's done,  
I'll plan our wedding through a go-between.  
Should Heaven disappoint my fondest hopes,\*  
I'll throw away a life in vernal bloom.  
If to a lover's plea you shut your heart,  
I'll have pursued you all in vain, for naught!"  
    All hushed, she drank in words whose music lulled—  
love stirred the autumn calm of her fair eyes.  
She said: "Although our friendship's still quite new,  
how can my heart resist your heart's behest?  
To your kind bosom you have taken me—  
I'll etch your word, our troth, in stone and bronze."\*

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Dược lời như cởi lâm lỏng,  
giờ kim-hoàn với khăn hồng trao tay.

Rắng: "Trăm năm cùng từ đây.  
"Cùa tin gọi một chút này làm ghi."

Sắn tay bá quạt hoa qui,  
với cánh thoa ây túc-thi đổi-trao.

Một lời vừa gắn tết-giao,  
mè sau đường có xôn-xao tiếng người.

Vội-vàng lá rụng hoa rơi,  
chàng về viện sách nàng dời lầu trang.

Tử phen đá biết tuổi vàng,  
tình cảng thăm-thia dạ càng ngắn-ngo.

Sông Tương một dải nồng sò,  
bèn trông đầu nợ bên chờ cuối kia.

Một tường tuyệt chờ sương che,  
tin xuân đâu dẽ đi về cho nàng.

Lần-lần ngày gió đêm trăng,  
thưa hồng rậm lục dà chừng xuân qua.

Ngày vừa sinh-nhật ngoại-gia,  
trên hai đường dưới nùa là hai em.

Tung-bừng sầm-sứa áo-xiêm,  
biện dâng một lè xa dem tắc thành.

Nhà lan thanh-vắng một mình,  
ngǎm cơ hội-ngoè đã dành hôm nay.

Thời-trán thức thức sẵn bảy,  
gót sen thoản-thoát dạo ngay mè tường.

Cách hoa sè đậm tiếng vàng,  
dưới hoa đã thấy có chàng đứng trông.

Trách: "Lòng hờ-hững với lòng,  
"lúa-hương chọc đê lạnh-lùng bầy lâu.

"Những là đắp nhớ đồi sấu,  
"tuyệt-sương nhuộm nùa mai đầu hoa râm."

Nàng rắng: "Gió bắt mưa cầm,  
"đã cam tệ với tri-âm bầy chảy.

"Vắng nhà được buổi hôm nay,  
"lấy lòng gọi chút ra dây tạ lòng."

Lẩn theo núi giá đi vòng,  
cuối tường đường có nèo thông mới rào.

Xắn tay mở khóa động đảo,

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Her words untied a knot within his breast—  
to her he passed gold bracelets and red scarf.

"Henceforth I'm bound to you for life," he said.  
"Call these small gifts a token of my love."

In hand she had a sunflower-figured fan:\*

she traded it that instant for her pin.

They had just sworn an oath to seal their pact  
when from the backyard voices came, abuzz.  
Both fled—in flurries leaves and flowers fell,  
and he regained his study, she her room.

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The stone and gold had touched—and from that time,  
their love grew deeper, more distraught their minds.

The Hsiang, the stream of longing tears, ran low:  
he waited at the spring, she at the mouth.\*

The wall rose like a snow-capped mountain range,  
and words of love could not go back and forth.

As windswept days and moonlit nights wheeled round,  
red dimmed, green deepened—spring was past and gone.  
A birthday feast fell due in Mother's clan:  
with their two younger children, both old folks  
in gay attire left home to journey forth  
presenting their best wishes and a gift.

A hushed, deserted house—she stayed alone:  
a chance to see him on this day, she thought.  
She set out fare in season, treats galore,  
then toward the wall she bent her nimble steps.  
She sent a soft-voiced call across the flowers:  
he was already there awaiting her.

He said: "Your heart cares not for what I feel—  
so long you've let love's fire burn to cold ash.  
Sorrow and yearning I have felt by turns,  
and half my head of hair frost's tinged with gray."

She said: "Wind's held me up, rain's kept me back—  
I've hurt your feelings much against my wish.  
I'm home alone today—I've come out here  
to make amends repaying love for love."

She slid around the rock garden and reached  
a fresh-barred passage at the wall's far end.  
She rolled up sleeves, unlocked the fairy cave,\*

rẽ mây trông tỏ lối vào Thiên-thai.  
 Mắt nhìn mặt càng thêm tươi.  
 Bên lời van-phúc bên lời hàn-huyền.  
 Sánh vai về chồn thư-hiên,  
 gõp lời phong-nguyệt nặng nguyễn non-sóng.  
 Trên yên bút-giá thi-đồng,  
 đậm-thanh một bức tranh tùng treo trên.  
 Phong-sương đượm vẻ thiên-nhiên,  
 mặn khen nét bút càng nhìn càng tươi.  
 Sinh rằng: "Phác-họa vừa rồi.  
 "Phẩm-dề xin một vài lời thêm hoa."  
 Tay tiên gió táp mưa sa,  
 khoáng trên dừng bút thảo và bồn cầu.  
 Khen: "Tài nhả ngọc phun châu!  
 "Nàng Ban á Tạ cũng đâu thè này?  
 "Kiếp tu xưa ví chưa dày,  
 "phúc nào nhắc được giá này cho ngang."  
 Nàng rằng: "Trộm liếc dung-quang,  
 "chẳng săn ngọc-bội cùng đường Kim-môn.  
 "Nghì minh phận mông cánh chuỗn,  
 "khuôn xanh biết có vuông-tròn mà hay?  
 "Nhớ từ năm hảy thơ-ngây,  
 "có người tướng-sì đoán ngay một lời:  
 "Anh-hoa phát-tiết ra ngoài,  
 "nghìn thu bạc-mệnh một đời tài-hoa."  
 "Trông người lại ngầm dèn ta,  
 "một dày một mỏng biết là có nê?"  
 Sinh rằng: "Giải-cầu là duyên.  
 "Xưa nay nhân định thắng thiên cùng nhiều.  
 "Ví dầu giải-kết dèn điếu,  
 "thì đêm vàng-dá mà liều với thân."

Đú điếu trung-khúc ân-cấn,  
 lòng xuân phơi-phới chén xuân tảng-tảng.  
 Ngày vui ngắn chẳng đầy gang,  
 trông ra ác đà ngậm gương non doi.  
 Vắng nhà chẳng tiện ngồi dài,  
 già chàng nàng mới kịp dời song sa.

Đền nhà vừa thấy tin nhà,  
 hai thân còn dở tiệc hoa chưa về.

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and cleared through clouds the path to Paradise!\*

Face gazed at face to glow with purest joy.  
 Fond greetings they exchanged. Then, side by side,  
 they walked together toward his study-room  
 while mingling words of love and vows of troth.

395

Brush rack and tube for poems on his desk—  
 above, there hung a sketch of pale green pines.  
 Frost-bitten and wind-battered, they looked real:  
 the more she gazed, the more they sprang to life.  
 "It's something I dashed off just now," he said.  
 "Please write your comments, lending it some worth."  
 Her nymphic hand moved like a lashing storm  
 and penned some quatrains right atop the pines.  
 "Your magic conjures gems and pearls!" he cried.  
 "Could Pan and Hsieh have measured up to this?\*  
 If I did not earn merit in past lives,  
 could I be blessed with you, my treasure, now?"

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She said: "I've dared to peek and read your face:  
 you shall wear jade or cross the Golden Gate.\*  
 But I deem my own lot a mayfly's wing:  
 will Heaven square things out and round things off?\*  
 Back in my childish years, I still recall,  
 a seer observed my features—he foretold:  
 'All charms and splendors from within burst forth:  
 she'll live an artist's life, a life of woe.'  
 I look at you, then on myself look back:  
 how could good luck, ill luck conjoin and thrive?"

405

He said: "That we have met means fate binds us.  
 Man's will has often vanquished Heaven's whim.  
 But should the knot which ties us fall apart,  
 I'll keep my troth and sacrifice my life."\*  
 They bared and shared all secrets of their souls—  
 spring feelings quivered hearts, spring wine turned heads.

415

A happy day is shorter than a span:  
 the western hills had swallowed up the sun.\*  
 With none at home, she could no longer stay:  
 she left him, rushing back to her own room.

420

News of her folks she learned when she reached home:  
 her feasting parents would not soon be back.

425

Cửa ngoài vội rủ rèm the,  
xám-xám băng lối vườn khuya một mình.  
Nhật thưa gương giọi bóng cảnh,  
ngọn đèn trông lọt trướng huỳnh hắt-hiu.  
Sinh vừa tựa án thiu-thiu,  
dờ chiếu như tĩnh dờ chiếu như mê.  
Tiềng sen sè động giấc hèo,  
bóng trăng dà xê hoa lê lại gần.  
Bảng-khuâng đính Hiệp non thần,  
còn ngòi giấc mộng đêm xuân mơ-máng.  
Nàng rằng: "Khoảng vắng đêm trường,  
"vì hoa nên phải đánh đường tìm hoa."  
"Bây giờ rõ mặt dôi ta,  
"biết đâu rồi nữa chẳng là chiêm-bao."  
Vội mừng làm lẽ rước vào,  
đài sen nỗi sáp lư đào thêm hương.  
Tiên thể cùng thảo một chương,  
tóc mây một món dao vàng chia đôi.  
Vắng trăng vắng-vặc giữa trời,  
định-ninh hai miệng một lời song-song.  
Tóc-tơ cẩn-vận tắc lòng,  
trâm nǎm tạc một chữ đồng đèn xương.  
Chén hà sánh giọng quỳnh-tương,  
dái là hương lợn bình gương bóng lồng.  
Sinh rằng: "Gió mát trăng trong,  
"bấy lâu nay một chút lòng chưa cam.  
"Chày sương chưa nện cầu Lam,  
"sờ lấn-khan quá ra sàm-sờ chẳng."  
Nàng rằng: "Hồng-diệp xích-thẳng,  
"một lời cũng dà tiếng rằng tương-tri.  
"Đừng điều nguyệt nụ hoa kia,  
"ngoài ra ai lại tiếc gì với ai."  
Rằng: "Nghe nói tiếng cầm-dài,  
"nước-non luồng những lồng tai Chung Ký."  
Thura rằng: "Tiện-kỳ sá chi,  
"dà lòng dạy đèn dạy thì phái vắng."  
Hiên sau treo sẵn cầm trăng,  
vội-vàng sinh dà tay nâng ngang mày.  
Nàng rằng: "Nghé mọn riêng tay,  
"làm chi cho bận lòng này lầm thân!"

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She dropped silk curtains at the entrance door,  
then crossed the garden in dark night, alone.  
The moon through branches cast shapes bright or dark—  
through curtains glimmered flickers of a lamp.\*

The student at his desk had nodded off,  
reclining half awake and half asleep.

The girl's soft footsteps woke him from his drowse:  
the moon was setting as she hovered near.

He wondered—was this Wu-hsia the fairy hill,\*  
where he was dreaming now a spring night's dream?

"Along a lonesome, darkened path," she said,  
"for love of you I found my way to you."

Now we stand face to face—but who can tell  
we shan't wake up and learn it was a dream?"

He bowed and welcomed her, then he replaced  
the candle and refilled the incense urn.

Both wrote a pledge of troth, and with a knife  
they cut in two a lock of her long hair.

The stark bright moon was gazing from the skies  
as with one voice both mouths pronounced the oath.

Their hearts' recesses they explored and probed,  
etching their vow of union in their bones.

Both sipped a nectar wine from cups of jade—  
silks breathed their scents, the mirror glassed their selves.

"The breeze blows cool, the moon shines clear," he said,  
"but in my heart still burns a thirst unquenched."

The pestle's yet to pound on the Blue Bridge—\*  
I fear my bold request might give offense."

She said: "By the red leaf, the crimson thread,\*  
we're bound for life—our oath proves mutual faith.

Of love make not a sport, a dalliance,  
and what would I begrudge you otherwise?"

He said: "You've won wide fame as lutanist:  
like Chung Tzu-ch'i I've longed to hear you play."\*\*

"It's no great art, my luting," answered she,  
"but if you so command, I must submit."

In the back porch there hung his moon-shaped lute:  
he hastened to present it in both hands,  
at eyebrow's height. "My petty skill," she cried,  
"is causing you more bother than it's worth!"

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So lân dây vú dây vắn,  
bỗn dây to nhô theo vắn cung-thương.

Khúc đâu *Hán Sờ chiến-trường*,  
nghe ra tiếng sắt tiếng vàng chen nhau.

Khúc đâu *Tư Mã Phượng-cầu*,  
nghe ra như oán như sầu phái chăng.

Kê Khang này khúc *Quảng-lặng*,  
một rặng lưu-thủy hai rặng hành-vân.

*Quá-quan* này khúc Chiêu Quân,  
nửa phần luyện chúa nửa phần tư gia.

Trong như tiếng hạc bay qua,  
đục như tiếng suối mới sa nửa vời.

Tiếng khoan như gió thoảng ngoài,  
tiếng mau sầm-sắp như trời đổ mưa.

Ngọn đèn khi tó khi mờ,  
khiền người ngồi đó cùng ngơ-ngẩn sầu.

Khi tựa gối khi cúi đầu,  
khi vỏ chín khúc khi chau đôi mày.

Rắng: "Hay thi thật là hay,  
"nghe ra ngâm dâng nuốt cay thè nào!

"Lýa chí những bậc tiêu-tao,  
"dột lòng mình cũng nao-nao lòng người?"

Rắng: "Quen mắt nết đi rồi.

"Té vui thôi cũng tính trời biết sao.

"Lời vàng vàng lanh ý cao,  
"họa dần-dần bớt chút nào được không."

Hoa hương càng tò thúc hồng,  
đầu mày cuối mắt càng nồng tâm yêu.

Sóng tình dường dà xiêu-xiêu,  
xem trong âu-yêm có chiểu lá-lợi.

Thưa rắng: "Đừng lầy làm chơi.  
"Rè cho thưa hèt một lời dã nao!

"Vé chí một đóa yêu-dào,  
"vườn hồng chí dám ngăn-rào chim xanh.

"Đà cho vào bậc bồ-kinh,  
"đạo tòng-phu lầy chử trình làm đầu.

"Ra tuồng trên Bộc trong dâu,  
"thì con người ầy ai cầu làm chi.

"Phái điếu ăn xôi ở thi,  
"tiết trâm nấm nở bỏ đi một ngày.

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By turns she touched the strings, both high and low,  
to tune all four to five tones, then she played.

An air, *The Battlefield of Han and Chu*,\*  
made one hear bronze and iron clash and clang.  
The Ssu-ma tune, *A Phoenix Seeks His Mate*,\*  
sounded so sad, the moan of grief itself.

Here was Chi K'ang's famed masterpiece, *Kuang-ling*—\*  
was it a stream that flowed, a cloud that roamed?

*Crossing the Border-gate*—here was Chao-chün,  
half lonesome for her lord, half sick for home.\*  
Clear notes like cries of egrets flying past;  
dark tones like torrents tumbling in mid-course.  
Andantes languid as a wafting breeze;  
allegros rushing like a pouring rain.

The lamp now flared, now dimmed—and there he sat  
hovering between sheer rapture and deep gloom.  
He'd hug his knees or he'd hang down his head—  
he'd feel his entrails wrenching, knit his brows.

"Indeed, a master's touch," he said at last,  
"but it betrays such bitterness within!"  
Why do you choose to play those plaintive strains  
which grieve your heart and sorrow other souls?"  
"I'm settled in my nature," she replied.

"Who knows why Heaven makes one sad or gay?  
But I shall mark your golden words, their truth,  
and by degrees my temper may yet mend."

A fragrant rose, she sparkled in full bloom,  
 bemused his eyes, and kindled his desire.  
When waves of lust had seemed to sweep him off,  
his wooing turned to wanton liberties.

She said: "Treat not our love as just a game—  
please stay away from me and let me speak.  
What is a mere peach blossom that one should  
fence off the garden, thwart the bluebird's quest?  
But you've named me your bride—to serve her man,\*  
she must place chastity above all else.

They play in mulberry groves along the P'u,\*  
but who would care for wenches of that ilk?  
Are we to snatch the moment, pluck the fruit,\*  
and in one sole day wreck a lifelong trust?

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"Ngâm duyên kỳ-ngoại xưa nay,  
"lứa-doi ai dẽ đẹp tày Thôi Trương.  
"Mây-mưa đánh đồ đá-vàng,  
"quá chiếu nên đà chán-chường yễn-anh.  
"Trong khi chắp cánh liền cánh,  
"mà lòng rè-rúng đã dành một bên.  
"Mái tây dẽ lạnh hương nguyễn,  
"cho duyên đậm-thắm ra duyên bè-bằng.  
"Gieo thoi trước chàng giữ-giảng,  
"dẽ sau nén thận cùng chàng bối ai?  
"Vội chi liêu ép hoa nài?  
"Còn thân át lại dến-bối có kхи."  
Thầy lời doan-chính dẽ nghe,  
chàng càng thêm nể thêm vì mươi phân.  
Bóng tàu vừa lạt vê ngân,  
tin đâu đã thầy cửa ngăn gọi vào.  
Nàng thi vội trở buồng thêu,  
sinh thi đạo gót sân đào bước ra.

## II

Cửa sài vừa ngó then hoa,  
gia-đống vào gửi thư nhà mới sang.  
Đem tin thúc-phụ từ-đường,  
bơ-vơ lữ-thân tha-hương dẽ-huế.  
Liêu-dương cách-trở sơn-khé,  
xuân-đường kíp gọi sinh về hộ-tang.  
Máng tin xiết nỗi kinh-hoàng,  
băng mình lên trước dài trang tự-tinh.  
Gót đầu mọi nỗi định-ninh,  
nỗi nhà tang-tóc nỗi mình xa-xôi:  
"Sự đâu chưa kịp dôi-hối.  
"Duyên đâu chưa kịp một lời trao tơ.  
"Trăng thế còn đó trơ-trơ,  
"dám xa-xôi mắt mà thưa-thót lòng.  
"Ngoài nghìn dặm chõc ba đồng,  
"mỗi sáu khi gõ cho xong côn chầy.  
"Gin vàng giữ ngọc cho hay,  
"cho dành lòng kê chân mây cuối trời."  
Tai nghe ruột rỗi bời-bời.

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Let's ponder those love stories old and new—  
what well-matched pair could equal Ts'ui and Chang?\*  
Yet passion's storms did topple stone and bronze:\*

she cloyed her lover humoring all his whims.  
As wing to wing and limb to limb they lay,\*  
contempt already lurked beside their hearts.  
Under the western roof the two burned out  
the incense of their vow, and love turned shame.  
If I don't cast the shuttle in defense,\*  
we'll later blush for it—who'll bear the guilt?  
Why force your wish on your shy flower so soon?  
While I'm alive, you'll sometime get your due."

The voice of sober reason gained his ear,  
and tenfold his regard for her increased.  
As silver paled along the eaves, they heard  
an urgent call from outside his front gate.  
She ran back toward her chamber while young Kim  
rushed out and crossed the yard where peaches bloomed.

## II

The brushwood gate unbolted, there came in  
a houseboy with a missive fresh from home.  
It said Kim's uncle while abroad had died,  
whose poor remains were now to be brought back.  
To far Liao-yang, beyond the hills and streams,\*  
he'd go and lead the cortege, Father bade.\*

What he'd just learned astounded Kim—at once  
he hurried to her house and broke the news.  
In full detail he told her how a death,  
striking his clan, would send him far away:  
"We've scarcely seen each other—now we part.  
We've had no chance to tie the marriage tie.\*  
But it's still there, the moon that we swore by:  
not face to face, we shall stay heart to heart.  
A day will last three winters far from you:  
my tangled knot of grief won't soon unknit.  
Care for yourself, my gold, my jade, that I,  
at the world's ends, may know some peace of mind."

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She heard him speak, her feelings in a snarl.

Ngập-ngừng nàng mới giải lời trước sau: “Ông tơ ghét bồ chi nhau?”		
“Chưa vui sum-hợp đã sầu chia-phôi. “Cùng nhau trót đã nặng lời, dẫu thay mái tóc dám dời lòng tơ. “Quán bao tháng đợi năm chờ? “Nghì người ăn gió nằm mưa xót thâm. “Đã nguyên hai chữ đồng tâm, trăm năm thế chẳng ôm cầm thuyền ai. “Còn non còn nước còn dài, còn về còn nhớ đèn người hôm nay.”	550	
Dùng-dâng chura nờ rời tay, vắng đông trông đã đứng ngay nóc nhà.	555	
Ngai-ngùng một bước một xa, một lời trân-trọng chau sa mầy hàng.	560	
Buộc yên quay gánh voi-vàng, mỗi sáu xé nứa bước đường chia hai.	565	
Buồn trông phong-cảnh quê người, đầu cảnh quyền nhặt cuối trời nhận thưa.		
Não người cù gió tuấn mưa, một ngày nặng gánh tương-tư một ngày.		
Nàng còn đứng tựa hiên tây, chín hối vẫn-vít như vẩy mồi tơ.	570	
Trông chừng khói ngắt song thưa, hoa trôi-giạt thảm liễu xơ-xác vàng.		
Tẩn-ngắn dạo gót lầu trang, một đoàn mừng thọ ngoại-hương mới về.	575	
Hàn-huyên chura kịp giải-giề, sai-nha bỗng thấy bồn bê xôn-xao.		
Người nách thước kẻ tay dao, đầu trâu mặt ngựa ào-ào như sôi.		
Già-giang một lão một trai, một dây vô-loại buộc hai thảm-tinh.	580	
Đậy nhà vang tiếng ruồi xanh, rụng-rời khung dệt tan-tành gói may.		
Đỗ tê-nhuyễn của riêng-tây, sạch-sành-sanh vét cho đầy túi tham.	585	
Điều đâu bay buộc ai làm? Vì ai đan rập giật giàm bỗng dung?		

With broken words, she uttered what she thought: “Why does he hate us so who spins silk threads?* Before we've joined in joy we part in grief.	550
Together we did swear a sacred oath: my hair shall gray and wither, not my love. What matter if I must wait months and years? I'll think of my wayfaring man and grieve.	555
We've pledged to wed our hearts—I'll never leave and play my lute aboard another's boat.* As long as hills and streams endure, come back, remembering her who is with you today.”	560
They lingered hand in hand and could not part, but now the sun stood plumb above the roof. Step by slow step he tore himself away— at each farewell their tears would fall in streams.	565
Horse saddled and bags tied in haste, he left: they split their grief in half and parted ways.	
Strange landscapes met his mournful eyes—on trees cuckoos galore, at heaven's edge some geese. Grieve for him who must bear through wind and rain a heart more loaded down with love each day.	570
There she remained, her back against the porch, her feelings snarled like raveled skeins of silk. Through window bars she gazed at mists beyond— a washed-out rose, a willow gaunt and pale.	575
Distraught, she tarried walking back and forth when from the birthday feast her folks returned. Before they could trade news of health and such, in burst a mob of bailiffs on all sides.*	580
With cudgels under arm and swords in hand, those fiends and monsters rushed around, berserk.* They cangued them both, the old man, his young son— one cruel rope trussed two dear beings up.	585
Then, like bluebottles buzzing through the house,* they smashed workbaskets, shattered looms to bits. They grabbed all jewels, fineries, personal things, scooping the household clean to fill greed's bag.	
From nowhere woe had struck—who'd caused it all? Who'd somehow set the snare and sprung the trap?	590

Hồi ra sau mới biết rằng:  
phái tên xưng-xuất là thẳng bán tơ.  
Một nhà hoang-hồt ngắn-ngocr,  
tiềng oan dậy đất án ngòi lòa mây.  
Hạ-tử van-lay suốt ngày,  
diếc tai lán-tuất phủ tay tối-tán.  
Rường cao rút ngược dây oan,  
dẫu rằng đá cùng nát gan lọ người.  
Mặt trông đau-dớn rụng-rời,  
oan này còn một kêu trời nhưng xa.  
Một ngày lạ thói quan-nha,  
làm cho khóc-hại chẳng qua vì tiền.

Sao cho cõt-nhục vẹn-tuyễn?  
Trong khi ngộ-biền lòng quyển biết sao.  
Duyên hội-ngộ đức cù-lao,  
bên tình bên hiêu bên nào nặng hơn?

Để lời thệ hải minh sơn,  
làm con trước phái đến ơn sinh-thành.  
Quyết tình nàng mới hạ tình:  
"Rẽ cho để thiếp bán minh chuộc cha."

Họ Chung có kẻ lại già,  
cùng trong nha-dịch lại là tử-tâm.

Thầy nàng hiêu trọng tình thâm,  
vì nàng nghĩ cùng thương thâm xót vay.

Tính bài lót đó luổn dây,  
có ba trăm lạng việc này mới xuôi.

Hãy về tạm phó giam ngoài,  
đàn nàng qui-liệu trong đôi ba ngày.

Thương tình con tré thơ-ngây,  
gặp cơn vạ gió tai bay bất-kỳ.

Đau lòng từ-biệt sinh-ly,  
thân còn chẳng tiếc tiếc gì đền duyên.

Hạt mưa sá nghỉ phận hèn,  
liệu đem tắc có quyết đền ba xuân.

Sự lòng ngó với băng-nhân,  
tin sương đồn-đại xa gần xôn-xao.

Gắn miến có một mụ nào,  
đưa người viễn-khách tìm vào văn-danh.

Hồi tên rằng "Mã Giám-sinh."

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Upon inquiry it was later learned  
some knave who sold raw silk had brought a charge.\*  
Fear gripped the household—cries of innocence  
shook up the earth, injustice dimmed the clouds.  
All day they groveled, begged, and prayed—deaf ears  
would hear no plea, harsh hands would spare no blow.  
A rope hung each from girders, by his heels—  
rocks would have broken, let alone mere men.  
Their faces spoke sheer pain and fright—this wrong  
could they appeal to Heaven far away?  
Lawmen behaved that day as is their wont,  
wreaking dire havoc just for money's sake.\*

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By what means could she save her flesh and blood?  
When evil strikes, you bow to circumstance.  
As you must weigh and choose between your love  
and filial duty, which will turn the scale?  
She put aside all vows of love and troth—  
a child first pays the debts of birth and care.  
Resolved on what to do, she said: "Hands off—  
I'll sell myself and Father I'll redeem."

There was an elderly scrivener surnamed Chung,\*  
a bureaucrat who somehow had a heart.\*  
He witnessed how a daughter proved her love  
and felt some secret pity for her plight.  
Planning to pave this way and clear that path,  
he reckoned they would need three hundred liang.  
He'd have her kinsmen freed for now, bade her  
provide the sum within two days or three.

Pity the child, so young and so naïve—  
misfortune, like a storm, swooped down on her.\*  
To part from Kim meant sorrow, death in life—  
would she still care for life, much less for love?  
A raindrop does not brood on its poor fate;\*  
a leaf of grass repays three months of spring.\*

Matchmakers were advised of her intent—  
brisk rumor spread the tidings near and far.  
There lived a woman in that neighborhood,  
who brought a suitor, one from out of town.  
When asked, he gave his name as Scholar Mã\*

Hỏi quê rằng “Huyện Lâm-thanh cùng gần.”

Quá niên trạc ngoại tú-tuần,  
mày-râu nhẵn-nhụi áo-quần bánh-bao.

Trước thấy sau tớ lao-xao,  
nhà băng đưa mỗi rước vào lầu trang.

Ghế trên ngồi tót sô-sangled,  
buồng trong mỗi dâ giục nảng kip ra.

Nỗi mình thèm tức nỗi nhà,  
thèm hoa một bước lệ hoa mây hàng.

Ngại-ngùng rợn gió e sương,  
nhìn hoa bóng hẹn trông gương mặt dày.

Mỗi càng vén tóc bắt tay,  
nét buồn như cúc điệu gãy như mai.

Dẫn-do cân sắc cân tài,  
ép cung cầm nguyệt thử bài quạt thơ.

Mặn-nồng một vẻ một ưa,  
bằng lòng khách mời tùy cơ đặt-diu.

Rắng: “Mua ngọc đèn Lam-kiều,  
“sinh-nghi xin dạy bao nhiêu cho tướng.”

Mỗi rằng: “Đáng giá nghìn vàng!  
“Dớp nhà nhở lương người thương dám nài.”

Cò-kè bớt một thêm hai,  
giờ lâu ngà giá vàng ngoài bồn trâm.

Một lời thuyền đã êm giấm.  
Hãy đưa canh-thiếp trước cầm lầm ghi,

định ngày nạp-thái vu-qui.

Tiễn lung đâ sẵn việc gì chẳng xong.

Một lời cậy với Chung-công,  
khất-tử tạm lánh Vương-ông về nhà.

Thương tình con tré cha già.

Nhin nàng ông những máu sa ruột đâu:

“Nuôi con những ước về sau,  
“trao tơ phái lừa gieo cầu đáng nời.

“Trời làm chi cực bầy trời!

“Này ai vu-thác cho người hợp-tan.

“Búa-riu bao quán thân tàn,

“nở dày-dọa tré càng oan-khổc già.

“Một lần sau trước cùng là,

“thôi thì mặt khuất chẳng thà lòng đau!”

Theo lời càng cháy dòng châu.

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and claimed his home to be “Lin-ch’ing, near here.”\*

Past forty, far beyond the bloom of youth,  
he wore a smooth-shaved face and smart attire.

Master and men behind came bustling in—  
the marriage broker ushered him upstairs.

He grabbed the best of seats and sat in state  
while went the broker bidding Kiều come out.

Crushed by her kinsfolk’s woe and her own grief,  
she crossed the sill, tears flowing at each step.

She felt the chill of winds and dews, ashamed  
to look at flowers or see her mirrored face.

The broker smoothed her hair and stroked her hand,  
coaxing a wilted mum, a gaunt plum branch.

He pondered looks, gauged skills—he made her play  
the moon-shaped lute, write verses on a fan.

Of her lush charms he relished each and all:  
well pleased, he set to bargaining a deal.

He said: “For jade I’ve come to this Blue Bridge:\*

tell me how much the bridal gift will cost.”

The broker said: “She’s worth her weight in gold!  
But in distress they’ll look to your big heart.”

They haggled hard and long, then struck a deal:  
the price for her, four hundred and some liang.\*

All was smooth paddling once they gave their word—\*  
as pledges they swapped horoscopic cards

and set the day when, full paid for, she’d wed.  
When cash is ready, what cannot be fixed?

Old Chung was asked to help—at his request,  
old Vương could on probation go back home.

Pity the father facing his young child.

Looking at her, he bled and died within:

“You raise a daughter wishing she might find  
a fitting match, might wed a worthy mate.\*

O Heaven, why inflict such woes on us?  
Who slandered us to tear our home apart?

I would not mind the ax for these old bones,  
but how can I endure my child’s ordeal?

Death now or later happens only once—  
I’d rather pass away than suffer so.”

After he’d said those words he shed more tears

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liễu minh ông rắp gieo đầu tường vôi.  
 Vội-vàng kè giữ người coi,  
 nhô to nảng lại tím lời khuyên-can:  
 "Vé chi một mánh hổng-nhan,  
 tóc-tơ chưa chút đền ơn sinh-thành.  
 "Dâng thư đã thẹn nàng Oanh,  
 "lại thua á Lý bán minh hay sao?  
 "Cõi xuân tuổi hạc càng cao,  
 "một cây gánh-vác biết bao nhiêu cành.  
 "Lương trên dấu chặng dirt tình,  
 gió-mưa âu hấn tan-tanh nước-non.  
 "Thà rằng liễu một thân con,  
 hoa dấu rã cánh lá còn xanh cây.  
 "Phận sao đành vậy cũng vầy,  
 cầm như chặng đỗ nhứng ngày còn xanh.  
 "Cùng đừng tinh quần lo quanh,  
 "tan nhà là một thiệt mình là hai."  
 Phái lời ông cùng êm tai,  
 nhìn nhau giọt ngắn giọt dài ngắn-ngang.  
 Mé ngoài họ Mã vừa sang,  
 tờ hoa đã ký cán vàng mới trao.  
 Tràng già độc-địa làm sao,  
 cầm dây chằng lụa buộc vào tự-nhiên!  
 Trong tay đã sẵn đồng tiền,  
 dấu lòng đổi trắng thay đen khó gì.  
 Họ Chung ra sức giúp-vì,  
 lẽ tâm đã đặt tung-kỳ cung xong.

Việc nhà đã tạm thong-dong,  
 tinh-kỳ giục-giả đã mong độ về.  
 Một mình nương ngọn đèn khuya,  
 áo đầm giọt lệ tóc se mái sầu:  
 "Phận dấu dầu vây cùng dầu,  
 xót lòng deo-đắng bãy lâu một lời.  
 "Công-trinh kè biết mầy mươi!  
 "Vi ta khăng-khit cho người dờ-dang.  
 "Thề hoa chưa ráo chén vàng,  
 lỗi thể thôi đã phụ-phảng với hoa.  
 "Trời Liêu non-nước bao xa,  
 "nghỉ đâu rẽ cửa chia nhà tự tôi.

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and made to knock his head against a wall.  
 They rushed to stop him, then she softly spoke  
 and with some words of comfort calmed him down.\*  
 "What is she worth, a stripling of a girl  
 who's not repaid one whit a daughter's debts?"  
 Ying once shamed me, petitioning the throne—\*  
 could I fall short of Li who sold herself?\*  
 As it grows old, the cedar is a tree\*  
 that singly shoulders up so many boughs.  
 If moved by love you won't let go of me,  
 I fear a storm will blow and blast our home.  
 You'd better sacrifice just me—one flower  
 will turn to shreds, but green will stay the leaves.  
 Whatever lot befalls me I accept—  
 think me a blossom nipped when budding green.  
 Let no wild notions run around your head  
 or you shall wreck our home and hurt yourself."  
 Words of good sense sank smoothly in his ear—  
 they stared at one another, pouring tears.

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Outside, that Scholar Mã appeared again—  
 they signed the contract, silver then changed hands.\*  
 A wanton god, the Old Man of the Moon,\*  
 at random tying couples with his threads!  
 When money's held in hand it's no great trick  
 swaying men's hearts and turning black to white.  
 Old Chung did all he could and gave all help:  
 gifts once presented, charges were dismissed.

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Her family's woes were settled for a time,  
 but now the bridal hour drew on apace.  
 Alone, she huddled by the midnight lamp,  
 with tear-soaked gown and sorrow-withered hair:  
 "No matter what fate deals me, I will grieve  
 for him who's steadfast kept the vow he swore.  
 How much he toiled and strove to win my love!  
 But grown attached to me, he's marred his life.  
 The cup we both drank from has barely dried  
 when I now break my oath and play him false.  
 In far-away Liao-yang how can he guess  
 our union's torn asunder by my hand?

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"Biết bao duyên-nợ thê-bối!	705
"Kiếp này thôi thê thì thôi còn gì?	
"Tài-sinh chưa dứt hương thê, "làm thân trâu-ngựa đền nghỉ trúc-mai.	
"Nợ tình chưa trả cho ai, "khôi tình mang xuồng tuyến-dài chưa tan."	710
"Nỗi riêng riêng nhùng bàn-hoàn, dầu chong tráng đĩa lệ tràn thăm khàn.	
Thúy Vân chợt tỉnh giấc xuân, dưới đèn ghé đèn ân-cần hỏi-han:	
"Cơ trời đâu-bé da-doan, "một nhà để chị riêng oan một mình.	715
"Cơ chi ngồi nhẫn tàn canh? "Nỗi riêng còn mắc mồi tình chi đây?"	
Rắng: "Lòng dang thốn-thức đầy, "tơ duyên còn vướng mồi này chưa xong.	720
"Hờ môi ra cùng thận-thùng, để lòng thi phụ tâm lòng với ai.	
"Cây em em có chịu lời, ngồi lên cho chị lạy rồi sẽ thưa.	
"Giữa đường dứt gánh tương-tư, keo loan chấp mồi tơ thừa mặc em.	725
"Ké từ khi gặp chàng Kim, khi ngày quạt ướt khi đêm chén thê.	
"Sự đâu sóng-gió bất-kỳ, hiều tình khôn lè hai bế vẹn hai.	730
"Ngày xuân em hay còn dài, xót tình máu-mù thay lời nước-non.	
"Chị dấu thịt nát xương mòn, ngậm cười chin suối hay còn thơm lây.	
"Chiếc vành với bức tờ mây, duyên này thi giữ vật này của chung.	735
"Dấu em nén vợ nén chồng, xót người mệnh bạc át lòng chắng quên.	
"Mặt người còn chút của tin, phím dán với mánh hương nguyễn ngày xưa.	740
"Mai sau dấu có bao giờ đốt lò hương ấy so tơ phím này, trông ra ngọn cỏ lá cây, thay hiu-hiu gió thi hay chị về.	

So many vows of love we traded once! Oh, what will they amount to in this life? But haunted by troth-incense we once burned, I'll be reborn a beast and make amends.*	705
Till I've paid off my debt of love to him, my heart will stay a crystal down below." *	710
Her secret thoughts kept spinning round and round— as lamp oil burned away, tears drenched her scarf.	
Thúy Vân, who just awoke from some sweet dream, stopped by the lamp and with concern inquired: "In Heaven's complex scheme of flux and change,* you're left to bear the family's woes alone.	715
Is that why you've stayed up the livelong night? Or with some secret are you still beset?"	
Kiều said: "My heart's near bursting, for it's caught in love's own webs and tangles yet unsnarled. I feel ashamed to part my lips and tell, but if I hid it I would wrong his love.	720
Should you agree I'll ask you . . . Please sit down and let me bow to you before I speak.	
Midway my bonds of love with him have snapped— let me trust you to mend and splice what's left.*	725
Since I met Kim I gave my fan in pledge— we drank of the same cup and swore our troth. Then out of nowhere broke a storm on us— how could both love and duty be fulfilled?	
You have long days of spring ahead—please heed the call of blood, redeem my pledge for me.*	730
Though flesh and bones will then have turned to dust, I'll breathe your happiness and smile down there.*	
Bracelets and pledge on paper decked with clouds: preserve this troth, these things are jointly ours. When bound as man and wife, you two will mourn a star-crossed girl and nurse her in your hearts.	735
I shall have vanished leaving few remains: a lute, troth-incense burned in days gone by.	
Sometime, if ever you will tune this lute or light that incense vessel, look outdoors: among the grass and leaves you'll see a breeze waft back and forth—you'll know that I've come home.	740

"Hồn còn mang nặng lời thề, "nát thân bô-liêu đền nghỉ trúc-mai. "Dạ-dài cách mặt khuất lời, "tươi xin giọt lệ cho người thác oan. "Bây giờ trâm gãy binh tan, "kẻ làm sao xiết muôn-vàn ái-ân. "Trâm nghìn gãy lạy tinh-quân, "tơ duyên ngắn-ngủi có ngắn ấy thôi. "Phận sao phận bạc như vôi? "Đã dành nước cháy hoa trôi lờ-làng. "Ôi Kim-lang, hời Kim-lang! "Thôi thôi thiếp đã phụ chàng từ đây!" Cạn lời hồn ngắt máu say, một hơi lặng ngắt đôi tay giá đồng. Xuân-huyên chởt tình giắc nồng, một nhà tấp-nập kẽ trong người ngoài. Ké thang người thuở bời-bời, mới dẫu cơn vưng chưa phai giọt hồng. Hồi sao ra sự lạ-lùng, Kiều càng nắc-nở nói không ra lời. Nỗi nang Vân mới rí tai: "Chiếc vành này với tờ bối ở đây." "Vi cha làm lỗi duyên mày, thôi thi việc ấy sau này đã em. "Vi ai rụng cái roi kim, đè con bèo nỗi mây chim vì ai? "Lời con dặn lại một hai, dẫu mòn bia đá dám sai tắc vàng." Lạy thôi nàng lại rén chiêng: "Nhờ cha trả được nghĩa chàng cho xuôi. "Sá chi thân-phận tôi-đòi, dẫu rằng xương trắng quê người quán đâu?"	745 750 755 760 765 770 775 780
Xiết bao kẽ nỗi thảm-sầu, khắc-canhh dâ giục nam-lâu mây hối. Kiều hoa dâu dâ đền ngoài, quán-huyền dâu dâ giục người sinh-ly. Đau lòng kẽ ở người đi, lệ rơi thảm đá tơ chia rù tầm. Trời hôm mây kéo tối râm,	785

My soul, still haunted by the oath, will try to keep my pledge though I'll have turned to naught.* The world of night will hide my face, my voice— yet, please shed tears for someone wronged by fate. Ah, now the pin has snapped, the vase has crashed:*	745 750 755 760 765
past all expression, how I cherish him! Through you I'll send my humblest bows to him: the tie of love between us is cut short. Why have I drawn a lot as gray as dirt?* The flower's doomed to drift along the stream.	750 755 760 765
O Kim, my dearest Kim! This is the end: as of today I'll have betrayed your trust."*	765
That said, her blood went wild, her spirit swooned: all breath fell hushed, both hands grew cold as ice. The parents rose at once from their deep sleep—* the household was astir inside and out.	770 775
They bustled fetching some tisane, some drug: she wakened from her faint, still wet with tears.	775
They asked her why so strangely she behaved— Kiều sobbed and sobbed but could not speak one word. Vân told her secret whispering in the ear:	780 785
"These are the bracelets, here's the written pledge." "Your father, I caused you to break your troth! But may your sister honor it in your stead. Whose fault is it that lovers now must part,* that now our child must lead a wanderer's life?"*	785 790 795
As to your wish, though stone may crumble down, my word will stand—I shall not fail your trust."	795
Before him she bowed low and softly said: "Father, help me fulfill my pledge to him— then I shan't mind a slave's own lot or care if I should leave my bones in alien soil."	795 800
How to express her grief while on the tower a watchman tolled and tolled the hours of night?	805
A carriage, flower-decked, arrived outside with flutes and lutes to bid dear kin part ways. She grieved to go, they grieved to stay behind: tears soaked stone steps as parting tugged their hearts.*	810 815
Across a twilit sky dragged sullen clouds—	815

dầu-dầu ngọn cỏ đầm-dầm cảnh sương. Rước nàng về dền trú-phường, bốn bể xuân khóa một nồng ở trong. Ngập-ngừng thận lục e hồng, nghỉ lòng lại xót-xa lòng đòi phen. Phảm tiên roi dền tay hèn, hoài công nắng giữ mưa gìn với ai: “Biết thân dền bước lạc-loài, nhị đào thả bê cho người tình chung. “Vi ai ngăn-dón gió đông, thiệt lòng khi ở đau lòng khi đi. “Trùng-phùng dấu họa có khì, thân này thôi có còn gì mà mong. “Đã sinh ra số long-dong, còn mang lây kiếp má hồng được sao?”	785
Trên yên sẵn có con dao, giấu cầm nàng đã gói vào cheo khăn: “Phòng khi nước dâ dền chân, dao này thi liệu với thân sau này.”	790
Đêm thu một khắc một chấy, bảng-khuảng như tính như say một mình. Chẳng ngờ già Mã Giám-sinh, vẫn là một đứa phong-tinh đã quen.	795
Quá chơi lại gặp hối đen, quen mùi lại kiềm ăn miễn nguyệt-hoa. Lẩu xanh có mụ Tú-bà, làng chơi đã trở về già hèn duyên.	800
Tinh-cờ chẳng hẹn mà nén, mặt cưa mướp đắng đòi bên một phường. Chung lưng mở một ngôi hàng, quanh năm buôn phần bán hương đà lẽ.	805
Đạo tim khắp chợ thi quê, giả danh hầu-hạ dạy nghề ăn-chơi. Rủi may áu cùng tại trời, đoạn-trường lại chọn mặt người vô-duyên.	810
Xót nàng chút phận thuyền-quyên, cành hoa đem bán vào thuyền lái buôn. Mẹo lừa đã mắc vào khuôn, sinh-nghi rẽ giá nghênh-hôn sẵn ngày.	815
Mừng thầm: “Cờ dâ dền tay!	820

grasses and branches drooped, all drenched with dew. He led her to an inn and left her there within four walls, a maiden in her spring. The girl felt torn between dire dread and shame— she'd sadly brood, her heart would ache and ache. A rose divine lay fallen in vile hands, once kept from sun or rain for someone's sake: “If only I had known I'd sink so low, I should have let my true love pluck my bud. Because I fenced it well from the east wind,* I failed him then and make him suffer now. When we're to meet again, what will be left of my poor body here to give much hope? If I indeed was born to float and drift, how can a woman live with such a fate?”	785
Upon the table lay a knife at hand— she grabbed it, hid it wrapped inside her scarf: “Yes, if and when the flood should reach my feet, this knife may later help decide my life.”	795
The autumn night wore on, hour after hour— alone, she mused, half wakeful, half asleep. She did not know that Scholar Mã, the rogue, had always patronized the haunts of lust. The rake had hit a run of blackest luck: in whoredom our whoremaster sought his bread.	800
Now, in a brothel, languished one Dame Tú* whose wealth of charms was taxed by creeping age. Mere hazard, undesigned, can bring things off: sawdust and bitter melon met and merged.* They pooled resources, opening a shop to sell their painted dolls all through the year.* Country and town they scoured for “concubines” whom they would teach the trade of play and love.	805
With Heaven lies your fortune, good or ill, and woe will pick you if you're marked for woe. Pity a small, frail bit of womankind, a flower sold to board a peddler's boat. She now was caught in all his bag of tricks: a paltry bridal gift, some slapdash rites.	815
He crowed within: “The flag has come to hand!*	820

"Càng nhìn về ngọc càng say khúc vàng.  
"Đã nén quốc-sắc thiên-hương,  
"một cười này hồn nghìn vàng chẳng ngoa.  
"Về đây nước trước bể hoa,  
"vương-tôn qui-khách át là đua nhau.  
"Hắn ba trâm lạng kẽm dâu,  
"cùng đà vừa vồn còn sau thi lời.  
"Mièng ngon kẽ dên tận nơi,  
"võn nhà cũng tiếc của trời cũng tham.  
"Đào tiên dâ bén tay phảm,  
"thì vin cảnh quit cho cam sự đời!  
"Dưới trần mây mặt làng chơi,  
"chơi hoa đà dê mây người biết hoa.  
"Nước vỏ lựu máu mào gá,  
"mượn màu chiêu-tập lại là còn nguyên.  
"Mập-mờ đánh lận con den,  
"bao nhiêu cũng bầy nhiêu tiền mắt chí?  
"Mụ già hoặc có điều gì,  
"liếu công mắt một buổi qui mà thôi.  
"Vá đây đường-sá xa-xôi,  
"mà ta bất-dộng nữa người sinh nghi."  
Tiệc thay một dóa trà-mi,  
con ong đã tò đường đi lôi về.  
Một cơn mưa-gió nặng-nề,  
thương gì đèn ngọc tiếc gì đèn hương.  
Đêm xuân một giấc mơ-màng,  
đuốc hoa đê đó mặc nàng nằm tro.  
Giọt riêng tâm-tâ tuôn mưa,  
phấn cảm nỗi khách phấn dơ nỗi mình:  
"Tuồng chi là giồng hôi-tanh?  
"Thân nghìn vàng đê ô-danh má hồng.  
"Thôi còn chi nữa mà mong?  
"Đời người thôi thê là xong một đời."  
Giận duyên túi phận bời-bời,  
cầm dao nàng đã toan bài quyên-sinh.  
Nghỉ đi nghỉ lại một mình:  
"Một mình thì chờ hai tình thì sao?  
"Sau dấu sinh sự thê nào,  
"truy-nguyên chặng kéo lùy vào song-thàn.  
"Nỗi mình âu cũng giãn dần.

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I view rare jade—it stirs my heart of gold!  
The kingdom's queen of beauty! Heaven's scent!  
One smile of hers is worth pure gold—it's true.  
When she gets there, to pluck the maiden bud,  
princes and gentlefolk will push and shove.  
She'll bring at least three hundred liang, about  
what I have paid—net profit after that.  
A morsel dangles at my mouth—what God  
serves up I crave, yet money hate to lose.  
A heavenly peach within a mortal's grasp:  
I'll bend the branch, pick it, and quench my thirst.  
How many flower-fanciers on earth  
can really tell one flower from the next?  
Juice from pomegranate skin and cockscomb blood  
will heal it up and lend the virgin look.  
In dim half-light some yokel will be fooled:  
she'll fetch that much, and not one penny less.  
If my old broad finds out and makes a scene,  
I'll take it like a man, down on my knees!  
Besides, it's still a long, long way from home:  
if I don't touch her, later she'll suspect."\*

Oh, shame! A pure camellia had to let  
the bee explore and probe all ins and outs.  
A storm of lust broke forth—it would not spare  
the flawless jade, respect the pristine scent.  
All this spring night was one bad dream—she woke  
to lie alone beneath the nuptial torch.  
Her tears of silent grief poured down like rain—  
she hated him, she loathed herself as much:  
"What breed is he, a creature foul and vile?  
My body's now a blot on womanhood.  
What hope is left to cherish after this?  
A life that's come to this is life no more."

By turns she cursed her fate, she moaned her lot.  
She grabbed the knife and thought to kill herself.\*  
She mulled it over: "If I were alone,  
it wouldn't matter—I've two loved ones, though.  
If trouble should develop afterwards,  
an inquest might ensue and work their doom.  
Perhaps my plight will ease with passing time.

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"Kíp chảy thôi cũng một lần mà thôi."

Những là do-dần ngược xuôi,  
tiếng gà nghe đã gáy sôi mé tường.

Lầu mai vừa rúc còi sương,  
Mà-sinh giục-giả vội-vàng ra đi.

Đoạn-trường thay lúc phân-kỳ!  
Vò câu khắp-khênh bánh xe gập-ghềnh.

Bé ngoái mươi dặm trường-đinh,  
Vương-ông mở tiệc tiễn-hành đưa theo.

Ngoài thi chủ khách đậm-diu,  
một nhà huyền với một Kiều ở trong.

Nhin càng lâ-châ giọt hồng,  
rì tai nàng mới giải lòng thấp cao:

"Hồ sinh ra phận thơ đào,  
công cha nghĩa mẹ kiếp nào trả xong?

"Lờ-làng nước dục bụi trong,  
trăm năm để một tâm lòng từ đây.

"Xem gương trong bầy nhiêu ngày,  
thân con chẳng kéo mắc tay bợm già!

"Khi về bỏ vàng trong nhà,  
khi vào dùng-dâng khi ra vội-vảng.

"Khi ăn khi nói lờ-làng,  
khi thấy khi tờ xem thường xem khinh.

"Khác màu kẽ quí người thanh,  
ngầm ra cho kỳ như hình con buồn.

"Thôi con còn nói chi con?

"Sông nhớ dắt khách thác chôn quê người!"

Vương-bà nghe bầy nhiêu lời,  
tiếng oan đâ muôn vạch trời kêu lên.

Vài tuần chưa cạn chén khuyên,  
mè ngoài nghỉ đã giục liên ruồi xe.

Xót con lòng nặng chẽ-chẽ,  
trước yến ông đã nắn-ni thấp cao:

"Chút thân yêu liễu thơ đào,  
dớp nhà đèn nỗi giãn vào tôi ngươi.

"Từ đây góc bờ bên trời,  
nắng-mưa thui-thuí quê người một thân.

"Nghìn tấm nhở bóng tung-quân,  
tuyệt-sương che-chở cho thân cát-dâng."

Cạn lời khách mới thưa rằng:

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Sooner or later, I'm to die just once."

While she kept tossing reasons back and forth,  
a rooster shrilly crowed outside the wall.  
The watchtower horn soon blared through morning mists,  
so Mâ gave orders, making haste to leave.  
Oh, how it rends the heart, the parting hour,  
when horse begins to trot and wheels to jolt!

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Ten miles beyond the city, at a post,  
the father gave a feast to bid farewell.  
While host and guests were making cheer outside,  
mother and Kiều were huddling now indoors.\*

As they gazed at each other through hot tears,  
Kiều whispered all her doubts in mother's ear:  
"I'm just a girl, so helpless, to my shame—  
when could I ever pay a daughter's debts?

Lost here where water's mud and dust's soil-free,\*  
I'll leave with you my heart from now, for life.  
To judge by what I've noticed these past days,  
I fear a scoundrel's hands are holding me.

When we got there, he left me all alone.  
He tarried coming in, but out he dashed.  
He halts and stammers often when he talks.  
His men make light of him, treat him with scorn.

He lacks the ease and grace of gentlefolk,  
seeming just like some merchant on close watch.  
What else to say? Your daughter's doomed to live  
on foreign land and sleep in alien soil."

At all those words, Dame Vương let out a shriek  
that would pierce heaven, crying for redress.

Before they had drunk dry the parting cup,  
Mâ rushed outside and urged the coach to leave.

Mourning his daughter in his heavy heart,  
old Vương stood by the saddle begging Mâ:  
"Because fate struck her family, this frail girl  
is now reduced to serving you as slave.

Henceforth, beyond the sea, at heaven's edge,  
she'll live lone days with strangers, rain or shine.  
On you, her lofty oak, she will depend,  
a vine you'll shelter from cold frosts and snows." \*

Whereat the bridegroom said: "Our feet are bound

"Buộc chān thòi cung xích-thằng nhiệm-trao.

905

"Mai sau dẫu đèn thè nào,

"kia gương nhật-nguyệt nọ dao quí-thân!"

Dùng-dùng gió giục mây vần,

một xe trong cõi hồng-trần như bay.

Trông vời gat lệ chia tay,

góc trời thăm-thẳm đêm ngày đầm-dâm.

910

## III

Nàng thì cõi khách xa-xăm,  
bắc phau cầu già den rầm ngàn mây.

Vi-lô san-sát hơi may,

một trời thu đê riêng ai một người.

Dặm khuya ngắt-tạnh mù khơi,  
thầy tráng mà thận nhứng lời non-sông,

Rừng thu từng biếc chen hồng,  
nghe chim như nhắc tâm lòng thần-hôn.

Những lá lạ nước lá non,

Lâm-tri vừa một tháng tròn tới nơi.

Xe châu dừng bánh cửa ngoài,  
rém trong đà thầy một người bước ra.

Thoắt trông lờn-lợt màu da,  
ăn gì cao-lớn dẫy-dà làm sao!

Trước xe lori-lá han-chào,  
vâng lời nàng mời bước vào tận nơi.

Bên thì mày à mày ngài,

bên thi ngồi bồn nằm người làng chơi.

Giữa thi hương-án hắn-hoi,  
trên treo một tượng tráng đôi lông mày.

Lầu xanh quen lối xưa nay,  
nghề này thi lẫy ông này tiên-sư,

hương-hoa hôm sớm phụng-thờ.

Có náo xẫu vía có thura mồi hàng,

cói xiêm lột áo sô-sang,

trước thần sè nguyệt mánh hương lầm-rầm.

Đôi hoa lót xuồng chiêu nấm,  
bướm-ong bay lại ấm-ấm tú-vi!

Kiều còn ngo-ngắn biết gi,

cứ lời lạy xuồng mụ thi khẩn ngay:

920

925

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940

by that mysterious thread of crimson silk.

The sun's my witness—if I should break faith,  
may all the demons strike me with their swords!"

905

By stormwinds hurtled under rolling clouds,  
the coach roared off in swirls of ocher dust.

Wiping their tears, they followed with their eyes:  
on that horizon, day and night, they'd gaze.

910

## III

She traveled far, far into the unknown.  
Bridges stark white with frost, woods dark with clouds.  
Reeds huddling close while blew the cold north wind:  
an autumn sky for her and her alone.

A road that stretched far off in hushed, still night:  
she saw the moon, felt shame at her love vows.

Fall woods—green tiers all interlaid with red:  
bird cries reminded her of her old folks.\*

She crossed unheard-of streams, climbed nameless hills—  
the moon waxed full again: Lin-tzu was reached.\*

915

The carriage stopped before an entrance gate—\*  
a woman, parting curtains, stalked right out.

One noticed at first glance her pallid skin—  
what did she feed upon to gain such bulk?

With wanton cheer she met them by the coach—  
Kiều, at her bidding, meekly stepped indoors.

920

On one side, there sat girls with penciled brows,  
and on the other four or five gay blades.

Between, an altar all rigged out: above,  
the image of that god with hoary brows.

925

In bawdyhouses old tradition bids\*  
them worship him as patron of their trade,

offer him flowers, burn incense day and night.  
When some jinxed gal drew too few customers,

in front of him she'd doff her shirt and skirt,  
then light some incense candles mumbling prayer.

She'd take all faded flowers to line her mat,  
and bees would swarm a-buzzing all-around!

930

Bewildered, unaware of what it was,

Kiều just knelt down as told—the bawd then prayed:

940

"Cửa hàng buôn-bán cho may,  
đêm đêm Hân-thực ngày ngày Nguyên-tiêu.  
"Muôn nghìn người thấy cùng yêu,  
xôn-xao anh-yên dập-diu trúc-mai.  
"Tin nhan vẫn lá thư bời!  
"Đưa người cửa trước rước người cửa sau!"  
Lạ tai nghe chưa biết đâu,  
xem tinh ra cùng những màu dở-dang.  
Lẽ xong hương-hóa gia-dường,  
Tú-bà vất nóc lên giường ngồi ngay.  
Dạy rằng: "Con lạy mẹ đây,  
lay rồi sang lạy cậu mày bên kia."  
Nàng rằng: "Phái bước lưu-lý,  
phận hén vắng đà cam bể tiêu-tinh.  
"Điều đâu lầy yên làm anh,  
ngày-thơ chẳng biết là danh-phận gì.  
"Đủ điều nạp-thái vu-quí,  
đã khi chung-chạ lại khi đứng-ngồi.  
"Giờ ra thay bậc đổi ngôi,  
dám xin gửi lại một lời cho mình."  
Mụ nghe nàng nói hay tinh,  
bây giờ mới nỗi tam-bành mụ lên:  
"Này này sự đã quá-nhiên!  
"Thôi đã cướp sông chồng min đi rồi!  
"Bảo rằng đi dạo lầy người,  
đem về rước khách kiêm lời mà ăn.  
"Tuồng vò-nghìa ở bắt-nhân,  
buồn mình trước đà tần-mẫn thứ chơi.  
"Màu hổ đà mêt đi rồi,  
thôi thôi vồn-liêng đi đời nhà ma!  
"Con kia đã bán cho ta,  
vào nhà phái cứ phép nhà tao đây.  
"Lão kia có giờ bài bây,  
chẳng vắng vào mặt mà mày lại nghe.  
"Cớ sao chịu tốt một bể?  
"Gái tơ mà đà ngứa nghẽ sớm sao?  
"Phái làm cho biết phép tao!"  
Giật bi-tiên rắp sẵn vào ra tay.  
Nàng rằng: "Trời thảm đất dày!  
"Thân này đã bỏ những ngày ra đi.

"May fortune bless this house and business thrive  
on nights of mirth, on days of revelry!\*"  
May all men fall in love with her and come  
flocking like orioles and swallow-birds!  
Let billets-doux and messages pour in!\*" 945  
Let clients throng both doorways, front and back!"  
Strange sounds that made no sense to Kiều's stunned ears,  
and that whole scene struck her as all amiss.  
Once she'd paid homage to her household god,  
Dame Tú installed herself upon a couch. 950  
She ordered: "Kneel and bow before your aunt,  
then go and kowtow to your uncle there."  
"By fortune banished from my home," said Kiều,  
I hugged my humble lot as concubine.\*  
A swallow's somehow turned an oriole:\*

what's my real status I'm too young to know.  
With bridal presents, wedding rites, and all,  
we did share bed and board, as man and wife.  
But now it seems the roles and ranks have changed:  
may I beg you to make it clear for me?" 955  
The woman heard the tale and learned the truth—  
her devils, fiends, and demons all broke loose:\*

"What happened is as plain as day to see!  
She caught my man alive for her own use!  
I sent him for some lass to bring back here  
and put to work as hostess, earn our bread. 960  
But that false-hearted knave, that beastly rogue  
had his damn itch—he played and messed with her.  
Now that the cloth has lost all starch and glaze,  
there goes to hell the money I put up!

You little strumpet, they sold you to me,  
and in my house you go by my house rules.  
When that old lecher tried his dirty trick,  
why did you listen? Slap his face, instead!  
Why did you just lie there and take it all?  
The merest chit, do you already rut?  
I must teach you how I lay down the law."  
She grabbed a whip, about to pounce and lash.  
"Heaven and earth bear witness!" Kiều cried out.  
"My life I threw away when I left home." 975  
980

"Thôi thi thôi có tiếc gì!"  
 Sẵn dao tay áo túc-thì giờ ra.  
 Sợ gan nát ngọc liễu hoa!  
 Mụ còn trông mặt nàng đá quá tay.  
 Thương ôi tài sắc bắc này,  
 một dao oan-nghiệt dứt dây phong-trần.  
 Nỗi oan vờ-lờ xa gần,  
 trong nhà người chật một lần như nén.  
 Nàng thì bần-bặt giặc tiên,  
 mù thi cầm-cập mặt nhìn hồn bay.  
 Vực nàng vào chôn hiên tây,  
 cắt người coi-sóc rước thấy thuốc-men.  
 Nào hay chưa hết trán-duyên,  
 trong mê đường đà đứng bên một nàng.  
 Rí rằng: "Nhân-quá dở-dang,  
 "đã toan trốn nợ doan-trường được sao?  
 "Sở còn nặng nghiệp má đào,  
 "người dẫu muôn quyết trời nào đã cho.  
 "Hãy xin hết kiếp liễu-bồ,  
 "sóng Tiên-đường sẽ hen-hò về sau."  
 Thuốc-thang suốt một ngày thâu,  
 giấc mê nghe đà dâu-dâu vừa tan.  
 Tú-bà chực sẵn bên màn,  
 lừa lời khuyên-giải mơn-mạn gõ dần:  
 "Một người dễ có mây thân?  
 "Hoa xuân đang nhị ngày xuân còn dài.  
 "Cùng là lờ một lầm hai,  
 "dá-vàng sao nờ ép-nài mura-mây.  
 "Lờ chân trót đà vào dây,  
 "khóa buồng xuân để đợi ngày đào non.  
 "Người còn thì cửa hảy còn,  
 "tim nời xứng-dáng là con-cái nhà.  
 "Làm chi tội bão oan-gia?  
 "Thiệt mình mà hại đên ta hay gì?"  
 Kẽ tai mây nỗi nắn-ni,  
 nàng nghe đường cùng thi-phi rách-rời.  
 Vá trong thần-mộng mây lời,  
 túc-nhân áu cũng cò trời ở trong.  
 Kiếp này nợ trả chưa xong,  
 làm chi thêm một nợ chồng kiếp sau.

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What now remains of it to have and hold?"  
 At once she pulled the knife out of her sleeve—  
 O horror, she found heart to kill herself!  
 The bawd stood watching, helpless, as Kiều stabbed.

Alas, were all such perfect gifts and charms  
 to leave this earth, dismembered by a knife?

The girl's misfortune soon got noised abroad—  
 a crowd came pouring in and packed the house.  
 While she was lying there in slumber's lap,  
 the bawd just stared and shook, her wits scared off.

Then Kiều was carried out to the west porch—  
 someone nursed her, a doctor was called in.

Her ties to earth were not yet sundered, though—  
 asleep, Kiều sensed a girl was standing by.

And whispered she: "Your karma's still undone:  
 how could you shirk your debt of grief to life?

You're still to bear the fortune of a rose.\*  
 you wish to quit, but Heaven won't allow.

Live and fulfill your destiny, frail reed:\*\*  
 on the Ch'ien-t'ang we two shall meet again."\*\*

With balms and salves applied all through the day,  
 Kiều slowly wakened from her deathlike swoon.

Dame Tú was waiting by the patient's bed  
 to coax her into line with chosen words:

"How many lives can anybody claim?

You are a rosebud—spring has scarcely sprung.  
 Something has gone awry—how could I force  
 your sterling virtue into games of love?\*

But since you've strayed and ended here, lock up  
 your chamber waiting for your nuptial day.\*

While you still have your body you have all—  
 you'll make a perfect match with some young heir.  
 Why visit havoc on a blameless head?

Why lose your life and hurt me? What's the good?"

The earnest plea she murmured in Kiều's ear  
 sounded like logic, sorting right from wrong.  
 Besides, there was the message of her dream:  
 in human fortune Heaven takes a hand.  
 If she died now and left her debt unpaid,  
 she'd pay with interest in some future life.

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Lặng nghe ngẫm-nghĩ gót dấu,  
thưa rằng: "Ai có muôn đâu thề này.  
" Được như lời thề là may.  
"Hắn rằng mai có như rày cho chặng?  
"Sợ khi ong-bướm dài-dâng,  
"đèn diều sông đục sao bằng thác trong."  
Mụ rằng: "Con hày thong-dong.  
"Phái diều lòng lại dỗi lòng mà chơi?  
"Mai sau ở chặng như lời,  
"trên đầu có bóng mặt trời rạng soi."  
Thầy lời quyết-đoán hắn-hoi,  
danh lòng nàng cùng sê nguôi-nguôi dần.

Trước lầu Ngưng-bích khóa xuân,  
về non xa tắm trăng gần ở chung.  
Bốn bể bát-ngát xa trông,  
cát vàng cồn nọ bụi hồng đậm kia.  
Bè-bàng mây sớm đèn khuya,  
nửa tình nửa cảnh như chia tâm lòng.  
Tưởng người dưới nguyệt chén đồng,  
tin sương luồng những rày trông mai chờ.  
Bên trời góc bể bờ-vơ,  
tắm son gột-rúra bao giờ cho phai?  
Xót người tựa cửa hòn mai,  
quạt nồng ấp lạnh những ai đó giờ?  
Sân Lai cách mây nắng-mưa,  
có khi gốc tứ dà vừa người ôm.  
Buồn trông cửa bè chiếu hôm,  
thuyền ai thấp-thoáng cánh buồm xa-xa.  
Buồn trông ngọn nước mới sa,  
hoa trôi man-máu biết là về đâu?  
Buồn trông nội cỏ dâu-dâu,  
chân mây mặt đất một màu xanh-xanh.  
Buồn trông gió cuốn mặt duênh,  
âm-âm tiếng sóng kêu quanh ghẽ ngồi.

Chung-quanh những nước-non người,  
đau lòng lưu-lạc nên vài bốn câu.  
Ngậm-ngùi rú bức rèm châu,  
cách tường nghe có tiếng đâu họa vẫn.

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She listened, thinking hard from first to last,  
then said: "Who would have all this come to pass?  
If you make good your word, I'll thank my luck.  
But will tomorrow's deed match what's pledged now?  
I dread to deal with bees and butterflies—  
I'd sooner die unsoiled than live in mud."

1025

The madam said: "My daughter, ease your mind.  
How could I have the heart to humbug you?  
If later I renege, there sits my judge,  
the sun that shines on us from overhead."  
An oath so solemn set Kiều's heart at rest—  
little by little all her fears were calmed.

1030

Locked in her spring at Crystal Tower, she lived  
with friends—some hills far off, the moon near by.  
On all four sides her ranging eyes could see  
the gold of dunes, the ocher dust of trails.  
With shame she watched dawn clouds, the midnight lamp—  
the scene and what she felt both filled her soul.  
He'd shared the cup with her beneath the moon—  
now, day by day, he longed for news of her.  
Stranded and waifed upon a distant shore,  
when could she ever cleanse her heart of love?  
She grieved for those awaiting at the door:  
who fanned them now when hot, warmed them when cold?  
After these months, the yard's catalpa tree\*  
must be a size to stretch her arms around.

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She sadly watched the harbor in gray dusk—  
whose boat was that with fluttering sails, far off?  
She sadly watched the river flow to sea—  
where would this flower end, adrift and lost?  
She sadly watched the field of wilted grass,  
the bluish haze where merged the earth and clouds.  
She sadly watched the wind whip up the cove  
and set all waves a-roaring round her seat.

1050

Hemmed in by foreign streams and alien hills,  
the exile cried her grief in sad quatrains.  
Dully, she dropped the curtain, then she heard  
a voice across the wall reply her poems.

1055

Một chàng vừa trạc thanh-xuân,  
hình-dung chái-chuốt áo-khăn dù-dáng.

Nghì rắng cung mạch thư-hương,  
hói ra mới biết rắng chàng Sở Khanh.

Bóng nga thấp-thoảng dưới mảnh,  
trông nàng chàng cũng ra tinh deo-dai:

"Than ôi sắc nước hương trời!

"Tiếc cho đâu bỗng lạc-loài đèn dây.

"Giá đành trong nguyệt trên mây,  
hoa sao hoa khéo dọa-dày bầy hoa?

"Sốt gan riêng giận trời già,  
lòng này ai tỏ cho ta, hời lòng?

"Thuyền-quyên ví biết anh-hùng,  
"ra tay thảo cùi sô lồng như chơi."

Song thu đã khép cánh ngoài,  
tai còn đong-vọng mẩy lời sát-dịnh.

Nghì người thôi lại nghì mình,  
cám lòng chua-xót lạt tính bơ-vơ.

Nhùng là lắn-lửa nắng-mưa,  
kiếp phong-trần biết bao giờ mới thôi.

Đánh liêu nhẫn một hai lời,  
nhờ tay tẽ-dộ vớt người trầm-luân.

Mảnh tiên kẽ hết xa gần,  
nỗi nhà báo-dáp nỗi thân lạc-loài.

Tan sương vừa rạng ngày mai,  
tiện hồng nắng mới nhẫn lời gửi sang.

Trời tây lăng-dâng bóng vàng,  
phục-thư đã thấy tin chàng đèn nơi.

Mở xem một bức tiên mai,  
ranh-ranh tích việt có hai chữ đế.

Lấy trong ý-tứ mà suy:

"Ngày hai mươi một tuất-thì, phái chăng?"

Chim hôm thoi-i-thót về rừng,  
đóa trà-mi đã ngâm trăng nửa vành.

Tường đông lay-dộng bóng cảnh,  
rè song đà thấy Sở Khanh lén vào.

Sương-sùng đánh dạn ra chào,  
lay thôi nắng mới rí trao ân-cần.

Rắng: "Tôi bèo-bọt chút thân.

"Lạc dân mang lấy nợ-nần yền-anh.

1060

He was a stranger in the flush of youth,  
with polished image, elegant cap and robe.

1060

She thought him one brought up among fine books—  
when she inquired, she learned he was Sở Khanh.\*

He'd glimpsed the charmer hid behind the shade\*  
and seemed heart-smitten—he declared his love:  
"Alas, a beauty fit for kings and gods!"

1065

By what queer twist of fate did she stray here?  
She ought to rule the moon, among the clouds—\*

how could a rose be doomed to this vile life?  
My bosom boils at Heaven, that old scamp,  
but can she guess your feelings, O my heart?

1070

If only she could know, here is the man  
who'll free her from her cage—it's mere child's play."

The autumn window shut tight once again,  
his sonorous words still echoed in her ears.

1075

She thought of him, and then thought of herself:  
his pity touched her—she felt less a waif.

Day followed day, so humdrum, rain or shine:  
when could she ever leave this dust-gray life?

She'd take a chance, send word and beg the man  
to pluck her from the sea of all her woes.

1080

A letter told her tale: how she had paid  
a daughter's debts and by ill luck strayed here.

As dawn broke through the morning mists and glowed,  
she had a messenger deliver it.\*

1085

The gold-lit sky was blurring in the west  
when from the man a prompt reply arrived.

She opened his fine paper note and read:  
two characters, *hsı yüeh*, in clear-cut strokes.

She tried to penetrate their hidden sense:  
"The twenty-first, hour of the dog, perhaps?"\*

1090

Through dusk birds shuttled flying home to woods—  
over camellias peeped just half a moon.

Branches stirred shadows on the eastern wall:\*

parting the shutters, lo, Sở Khanh crept in.

1095

Abashed, she rallied heart to welcome him—  
on bended knees, she whispered her appeal:

"A water fern, a bubble—that's my fate.  
I've strayed to fall among these birds of mirth.\*

"Dám nhờ cõt nhục tử sinh.  
"Còn nhiều kẽt có ngäm vành vể sau."  
Lặng ngồi túm-tím gật đầu:  
"Ta đây nào phái ai đâu mà rắng.  
"Nàng dà biết dẽn ta chăng,  
"bè trâm-luân lăp cho băng mới thôi."  
Nàng rắng: "Muôn sự ơn người.  
"Thề nào xin quyết một bài cho xong."  
Rắng: "Ta có ngựa truy-phong,  
"có tên dướii trướng vồn dòng kiệu-nhi.  
"Thùa cơ lén bước ra đ!  
"Ba mươi sáu chуроc chуроc gì là hơn?  
"Đầu khi gió kép mưa đơn,  
"có ta đây cũng chăng cờn-cờ gi."  
Nghé lời nàng dà sinh nghi,  
song đà quá đỗi quán gi được thân.  
Cùng liều nhầm mắt đưa chân  
mà xem con tạo xoay-vần dẽn đâu.  
Cùng nhau lén bước xuồng lầu,  
song-song ngựa trước ngựa sau một đoàn.  
Đêm thu khắc lậu canh tàn,  
gió cây trút lá trăng ngàn ngäm gương.  
Lôi mòn cõ lạt màu sương,  
lòng quê di một bước đường một đau.  
Tiêng gà xao-xác gáy mau,  
tiêng người đâu dã mé sau dậy-dảng.  
Nàng căng thốn-thức gan vàng,  
Sở Khanh dã rẽ dây cương lõi nào.  
Một mình khôn biết làm sao,  
đặm rừng bước thấp bước cao hãi-hùng.  
Hóa-nhi thật cõ nõ lòng,  
làm chi giấy tía vỏ hồng lâm nao!  
Một đoàn đồ dẽn trước sau,  
vuốt đâu xuồng đất cánh đâu lên trời.  
Tú-bà tõc thẳng đèn nơi,  
hám-hám áp-diệu một hơi lại nhà.  
Hung-hãng chăng hỏi chăng tra,  
đang tay vùi liễu dập hoa tơi-bời.  
Thịt-da ai cũng là người,  
lòng nào hồng rụng thảm rời chăng đau.

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May I beg you to give me back my life?  
For you I shall knot grass and fetch jade rings . . ."\*

He listened, nodding, grinning to himself,  
then said: "I'm not just anybody, mind!  
Since you trust me and turn to me for help,  
I'll drain it, fill it in, your sea of woes!"

"I'll rest on you for everything," she said.  
"Decide—adopt whatever plan you will."

He said: "I have some horses fleet as winds,  
and in my service quite a brawny chap.  
Let's grasp our opportunity, slip away!

Can any scheme on earth surpass swift flight?\*  
If something should by any chance go wrong,  
it will not matter for I shall be there."

Her worst suspicions quickened at this speech—  
but gone too far, she could not now draw back.  
She shut her eyes and headlong flung herself  
to see how far the Maker would roll her.\*

Together they stole down the stairs and left,  
each on a horse, the girl behind the man.  
The autumn night was waning. Wind-lashed trees  
spilt leaves; the woods had swallowed up the moon.  
Grass wanly gleamed with dew along the trail—  
as step by step she went, she yearned for home.

In throaty chorus cocks were crowing dawn  
when from the rear she heard a hue and cry.  
Her heart began to thump inside her breast—  
Sở Khanh had quick turned rein and somewhere fled.  
She knew not what to do, left all alone  
to jolt her way in terror through the woods.

O Heaven, wanton knave, how could your heart\*  
let you thus crush and trample down a rose?  
A gang closed in on her—she had no claws  
to burrow and escape, no wings to fly.  
Dame Tú arrived in hot haste on the scene  
and swept her up to drag her home forthwith.

The madam asked no questions—wild with rage,  
she thrashed the flower, flailed the willow tree.  
All human beings are but flesh and blood—  
what rose, when torn and shattered, feels no pain?

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Hết lời thú-phục khẩn-cầu,  
uốn lưng thịt đồ giập dầu máu sa.  
Rắng: "Tôi chút phận đàn bà,  
"nước-non lia cùa lia nhà đèn đây.  
"Bây giờ sông thác ở tay.  
"Thân này đã đèn thê này thi thôi.  
"Nhưng tôi có sá chi tôi?  
"Phân tôi dành vậy vốn người dè đâu?  
"Thân lươn bao quần lâm đầu?  
"Chút lòng trinh-bạch từ sau xin chừa."  
Được lời mụ mới tùy cơ,  
bắt người báo-lành làm tờ cung-chiêu.  
Bấy vai có á Mã Kiều,  
xót nàng ra mới đánh liêu chịu doan.  
Mụ càng kẽ nhặt kẽ khoan,  
gạn-gùng đèn mực nồng-nàn mới tha.  
Vực nàng vào nghỉ trong nhà.  
Mã Kiều lại ngó ý ra dǎn lòi:  
"Thôi đã mắc lận thì thôi!  
"Đi đâu chẳng biết con người Sở Khanh?  
"Bạc tình nỗi tiếng lầu xanh,  
một tay chôn biệt mày cảnh phù-dung.  
"Đà-dao lập sẵn chước dùng,  
lạ gì một cõt một đồng xưa nay.  
"Có ba mươi lạng trao tay,  
không-dung chi có chuyện này trò kia.  
"Rồi ra trả mặt túc-thi,  
bớt lời liệu chó sân-si thiệt đời."  
Nàng rắng: "Thề-thốt nặng lời!  
"Có đâu mà lại ra người hiềm-sâu."  
Còn dang suy trước nghỉ sau,  
mặt mo dà thấy ở đâu dǎn vào.  
Sở Khanh lén tiếng rêu-rao,  
rắng: "Nghe mới có con nào ở đây,  
phao cho quyền gió rủ mây.  
"Hay xem có biết mặt này là ai?"  
Nàng rắng: "Thôi thề thi thôi!  
"Rắng không thi cùng vắng lời rằng không."  
Sở Khanh quát-mắng dùng-dùng,  
sẵn vào vừa rắp thị-hùng ra tay.

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Kiều spared no words—she pleaded, she confessed,  
bowing her mangled back, her bloodied head.

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She said: "This little woman left her home  
to trek through hills and streams and founder here.  
Now in your hands you hold my life or death.  
Brought to this pass, my person's reached an end.  
What care I for myself? My fate is set.  
But your investment would you really risk?  
How can an eel mind muddying its head?\*\*  
Hereafter I'll forget my maiden shame."

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The bawd seized on Kiều's promise—she required  
a guarantor, a pledge in black and white.  
Among the housemates was a girl, Mã Kiều,\*  
who pitied her and dared to vouch for her.  
The bawd kept grilling her and flaying her  
till she had spent her fury, then she quit.

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They carried Kiều indoors to nurse her wounds.  
Mã Kiều spoke out her mind and gave advice:  
"You did fall prey to him, an arrant scamp—  
who ever hasn't heard of that Sở Khanh?\*\*  
It's as a brothel cad he's made his name:  
his hand has plucked and buried many flowers.  
Both planned and played that feint, the 'sword in flight,'\*  
for bawd and pimp connived, as thick as thieves.\*  
Some thirty liang had passed from her to him—  
if not, would he have put that comedy on?  
Now that the deed is done, he'll turn about:  
don't you provoke him or you'll lose your life."  
"But he did swear those sacred oaths!" Kiều said.  
"How can he prove a man of such deceit?"

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Kiều was still brooding over this or that  
when he came ushering in his brazen face.\*  
Sở Khanh harangued for all the world to hear:  
"They say a wench, newcomer in this house,  
has claimed I tempted her, led her astray.\*  
Let her face me, see who I really am."  
She answered him: "Let's not discuss it, then.  
You say it didn't happen—so it did not!"  
Sở Khanh cursed her, damned her in thundering tones,  
and came at her with fists all poised to strike.

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Nàng rằng: "Trời nhè có hay!  
"Quyên anh rú yễn sự này tai ai?  
"Đem người dây xuống giềng thơi.  
"Nói rồi rồi lại ăn lời đưọc ngay.  
"Còn tiên tích việt ở tay.  
"Rò-ràng mặt ấy mặt này chờ ai?"  
Lời ngay dông mặt trong ngoài,  
ké ché bắc-nghia người cười vô-luong.  
Phụ tình án đã rò-ràng,  
dơ tuồng nghĩ mới kiềm đườngn tháo lui.  
Buồng riêng riêng những sụt-sùi,  
nghĩ thân mà lại ngâm-ngùi cho thân:  
"Tiếc thay trong giá trảng ngắn,  
"đen phong-trần cung phong-trần như ai.  
"Té vui cùng một kiếp người,  
"hỗng-nhan phái giồng ở đời mãi ru!  
"Kiếp xưa đã vụng đường tu,  
"kiếp này chẳng kéo đèn-bù mới xuôi.  
"Dẫu sao bình đã vỡ rồi,  
"lấy thân mà trả nợ đời cho xong."

Vừa tuần nguyệt sáng gương trong,  
Tú-bà ghé lại thong-dong dặn-dò:  
"Nghề chơi cùng lầm công-phu,  
"làng chơi ta phái biết cho dù điếu."  
Nàng rằng: "Mưa-gió dập-diều!  
"Liếu thân thi cùng phái liếu thề thôi."  
Mụ rằng: "Ai cũng như ai,  
"người ta ai mắt tiễn hoài dến đây?  
"Ở trong cõi lầm diếu hay,  
"nỗi đêm khép mờ nỗi ngày riêng chung.  
"Này con thuộc lây làm lòng,  
"vành ngoài bảy chừ vành trong tám nghẽ.  
"Chơi cho liếu chán hoa ché,  
"cho lán-lóc đá cho mê-mẩn đời.  
"Khi khóc hạnh khi nét ngài,  
"khi ngâm-ngợi nguyệt khi cười-cợt hoa.  
"Đều là nghề-nghiệp trong nhà,  
"đứ ngần ấy nết mới là người soi."  
Gót dấu vắng dạy mầy lời,

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"O Heaven," she exclaimed, "you do know who  
brought this to pass, seducing me, poor girl!\*"  
He led me on, then pushed me down the pit.  
He swore to me, then broke his oath at once.  
My hand still holds his note, which says *hsı yüeh*.  
That face was his own face—whose else was it?"

Her forthright words were heard by one and all:  
they scorned his perfidy, his heartless scheme.  
The lover's breach of faith was plain to see:  
shamefaced, the rascal beat a quick retreat.

Alone in her own room, she sobbed and wept—  
brooding upon herself, she mourned her lot:  
"O pity! A thing frost-pure and silver-white  
must roll in dust and storm, like all the rest.  
But, grief or joy, it's just one human fate:  
is a mere rose to last forevermore?\*  
Because I badly lived an earlier life,  
now in this world I must redeem past sins.  
My innocence is lost—a broken vase:  
my body shall pay off my debts to life."

The mirror of the moon was shining bright—  
Dame Tú sat down by Kiều and lectured her:  
"The trade of love, my girl, takes care and pains,  
and we who ply it must know all its tricks."  
"I am the toy of winds and storms," Kiều said.  
"If I must give my body, so be it!"

The bawd continued: "Men are all alike:  
they'll get their money's worth or won't come here.  
There are more things to love than meet the eye  
and ways to cope with men by day or dark.  
Know these by heart—learn seven ploys to catch  
and hold a man, eight ways to please in bed.  
Play love with them until you've played them out,  
till heads must swim, till hearts of stone must spin.  
Now flirt with eyebrows, now coquet with lips.  
Now sing the moon, now sport among the flowers.  
There you have it, our house's stock in trade:  
learn it and be a mistress of our craft!"\*

From first to last Kiều listened, learning all,

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dường chau nét nguyệt đường phai vẻ hồng.  
Những nghe nói dà thận-thùng.  
Nước đời lầm nỗi lạ-lùng khắt-khe.  
Xót mình cứa các buồng khuê,  
vở lòng học lây những nghề-nghiệp hay!  
Khéo là mặt dan mà dày!  
Kiếp người đã dẽn thề này thi thôi.  
Thương thay thân-phận lạc-loái,  
dẫu sao cũng ở tay người biết sao.  
Láu xanh mới rủ trướng đáo,  
càng treo giá ngọc càng cao phẩm người.  
Biết bao bướm lá ong lời,  
cuộc say đầy tháng trận cười suốt đêm.  
Dập-diệu lá gió cảnh chim,  
sớm đưa Tông Ngọc tối tìm Trường Khanh.  
Khi tỉnh rượu lúc tàn canh,  
giật mình mình lại thương minh xót-xa.  
Khi sao phong gâm rủ là,  
giờ sao tan-tác như hoa giữa đường.  
Mặt sao dày gió dạn sương,  
thân sao bướm chán ong chường bầy thân?  
Mặc người mưa Sở mây Tân,  
nhưng mình nào biết có xuân là gi.  
Đời phen gió tựa hoa kẽ,  
nửa rém tuyêt ngậm bồn bê trắng thâu.  
Cánh nào cánh chẳng deo sầu,  
người buồn cánh có vui đâu bao giờ.  
Đời phen nét vẽ câu thơ,  
cung cầm trong nguyệt nước cờ dưới hoa.  
Vui là vui gượng kéo mà,  
ai tri-âm đó mặn-mà với ai.  
Thờ-ơ gió trúc mưa mai,  
ngắn-ngør trăm mồi giùi-mài một thân.  
Nỗi lòng đời đoạn xa gần,  
chẳng vò mà rồi chẳng dẫn mà đau.  
Nhớ ơn chin chữ cao-sâu,  
một ngày một ngã bóng dâu tà-tà.  
Dặm nghìn nước thăm non xa,  
nhỉ đâu thân-phận con ra thề này.  
Sân hòe đôi chút thơ-ngây,

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her eyebrows pursed, her face turned deadly pale.  
She felt such shame just hearing what was taught.  
What ironies the tides of life throw up!  
A girl, wellborn and raised in her good home,\*  
now bound a prentice to this curious trade.  
How fast a face will harden, tanned by shame!  
Can human life sink lower than her plight?  
Alas for her, one gone astray and lost:  
what could she do, held in a stranger's clutch?

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Down came her curtains in the house of mirth:\*

high-priced, her jade was all the more desired.  
Around the rose swarmed bees and butterflies\*  
for nights of merriment, for months of spree.

Birds flocked the branch, winds stirred the leaves—she'd speed\*  
some beau at dawn, wait for some spark at dusk.\*  
When, late at night, wine fumes had all cleared off,  
she'd start from sleep to sorrow for herself.  
Brocade had wrapped her, silk had sheltered her—  
now torn to shreds, the rose lay by the road.

Poor callous face the wind and dew had tanned.  
Poor body bees and butterflies gorged on.  
Over her flesh let them all rage and storm—\*  
did she herself feel what they would call love?\*

She'd hug a breeze or flowers, she'd watch snow  
half hide the shades or moonlight spread around.  
But her own gloom would tinge each sight or scene:  
when you feel grief, can what you see give joy?  
She'd write some verse or paint, she'd pluck the lute  
by moonlight or play chess beneath the flowers.  
But such delights she feigned and did not feel:  
who can you love when no one knows your heart?  
Wind in bamboos, rain on plum trees she ignored:  
a hundred cares beset a single soul.

Her heart, evoking things long past or fresh,  
became a raveled skein, a mass of sores.  
She missed the two she owed nine debts, whose sun\*  
was sinking day by day toward mulberry trees.\*  
Beyond the deep-sunk streams and far-flung hills,  
how could they guess what had become of her?  
Of sophoras their yard had two, still young:\*

trân-cam ai kẽ dờ thay việc mình?

Nhớ lời nguyện-ước ba sinh,  
xa-xôi ai có thẫu tinh chăng ai?

Khi về hói liễu Chương-dài,  
cành xuân dâ bê cho người chuyên tay.

Tinh sầu mong trả nghĩa dày,  
hoa kia dâ chấp cành này cho chura?

Mỗi tình đời đoạn vò tơ,  
giắc hương-quan luồng lẩn mơ canh dài.

Song sa vò-võ phượng trời,  
nay hoảng-hôn dâ lại mai hôn-hoảng.

Lẩn-lẩn thô bạc ác vàng,  
xót người trong Hội Đoạn-Trường đời cơn.

Dâ cho lầy chữ hồng-nhan,  
làm cho cho hại cho tàn cho cân.

Dâ dày vào kiếp phong-trần,  
sao cho sl-nhục một lần mới thôi.

## IV

Khách du bỗng có một người,  
Kỳ Tâm họ Thúc cũng nòi thư-hương.

Võn người huyện Tich châu Thường,  
theo nghiêm-đường mớ ngôi hàng Lâm-tri.

Hoa-khôi mộ tiếng Kiều-nhi,  
thiếp hồng tim đên hương-khuê giri vào.

Trường tô giáp mặt hoa đào,  
vè nào chặng mặn nét nào chặng ưa?

Hái-đường mơn-mòn cảnh tơ,  
ngày xuân càng gió càng mưa càng nồng.

Nguyệt hoa hoa nguyệt nǎo-nùng,  
dêm xuân ai dẽ cầm lòng được chặng?

La gì thanh-khí lè hằng,  
một dây một buộc ai giảng cho ra.

Sớm đào tối mận lân-la,  
trước cỏn trảng-gió sau ra đá-vàng.

Dịp đâu may-mắn lạ đường,  
lại vừa gặp khoáng xuân-đường lại quê.

Sinh càng một tính mười mê,  
ngày xuân lắm lúc đi vè với xuân.

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who now could take her place and tend their needs?  
And she recalled her vow of deathless troth.\*

far, far away, did he know of her plight?  
When he came home for her, the willow branch  
had been snatched off and passed from hand to hand.\*  
She hoped his love could somehow be repaid:  
was now the flower grafted on the bough?

All her emotions tangled like sleeve silk  
as dreams of home kept stirring sleep till dawn.  
From her gauze-curtained window, at heaven's edge,  
alone, forlorn, she'd watch dusk follow dusk.  
While the moon hare and the sun crow whirled round,  
she mourned all victims in the Sorrow League.\*  
They're given all the splendor of a rose,  
but they must pay for it in coin of grief.  
Doomed to a life of dust and storm, they'll drink  
their cup of shame and odium to the dregs.

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Now, as a brothel patron, came a man:

Kỳ Tâm of the Thúc clan, a well-read breed.\*  
He'd followed Father leaving Hsi in Ch'ang\*  
to open at Lin-tzu a trading shop.  
Kiều's fame as queen of beauty had reached him—  
he called and left his card in her boudoir.

Behind the tasseled drapes he faced the flower;  
his fancy relished each of all her charms.  
The young camellia, shimmering on its stem,  
would glow still brighter with each fresh spring shower!  
Man and girl, girl and man in fevered clasp.\*  
on a spring night, how can one quell the heart?  
Of course, when two kin spirits meet, one tie\*  
soon binds them in a knot none can yank loose.  
They'd tryst and cling together night or day.\*  
What had begun as lust soon turned to love.\*

It chanced that, by a stroke of timely luck,  
his father went away to journey home.\*  
And more bewitched than ever, our young man  
would often see his darling these spring days.

Khi gió gác khi trăng sân,  
bầu tiên chuốc rượu câu thần nỗi thơ.  
Khi hương sớm khi trà trưa,  
bàn vây diêm nước đường tơ họa đàn.  
Miệt-mài trong cuộc truy-hoan,  
càng quen-thuộc nết càng dan-diu tình.  
Lạ cho cái sóng khuynh-thành,  
làm cho đồ quán xiêu đình như chơi.  
Thúc-sinh quen thói bôc rời,  
trầm nghein đồ một trận cười như không.  
Mụ càng tò lục chuột hồng,  
máu tham hễ thảy hơi đồng thi mè.  
Dưới trăng quyền dà gọi hè,  
đầu tường lừa lưu lập-lòe đâm bông.  
Buồng the phái buổi thong-dong,  
thang lan rủ bức trường hồng tắm hoa.  
Rõ máu trong ngọc trăng ngà!  
Dày-dày sẵn đúc một tòa thiên-nhiên.  
Sinh càng tò nét càng khen,  
ngu tinh tay thảo một thiên luật Đường.  
Nàng rằng: "Vàng biết ý chàng.  
"Lời lời chau-ngọc hàng hàng gãm-thêu.  
"Hay hẽn lẽ cùng nỗi điêu,  
"nỗi quê nghỉ một hai điêu ngang-ngang.  
"Lòng còn gửi áng mây vàng.  
"Họa vẫn xin hãy chịu chàng hôm nay."  
Rắng: "Sao nói lạ-lùng thay!  
"Cành kia chẳng phải cỗi này mà ra?"  
Nàng càng ú-dot thu-ba,  
đoạn-trường lúc ấy nghỉ mà buồn tênh:  
"Thiếp như hoa đã lia cành,  
"chàng như con bướm lượn vành mà chơi.  
"Chúa xuân dành dâ có nơi,  
"vẫn ngày thôi chờ dài lời làm chi."  
Sinh rằng: "Từ thuở tương-tri,  
"tâm riêng riêng những nặng vì nước-non.  
"Trầm nâm tính cuộc vuông-tròn,  
"phải dò cho đèn ngọn nguồn lạch sông."  
Nàng rằng: "Muôn đội ơn lòng.  
"Chút e bên thú bên tòng dẽ đâu.

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On wind-swept balconies, in moon-washed yards,  
they'd sip rare liquor, improvise linked verse.  
With incense burned at dawn, with tea at noon,  
they'd play chess games, perform duets on lutes.\*  
One dizzy round of pleasures caught them both—  
they knew each other's moods, grew more attached.

1295

A woman's charms, O wondrous tidal waves\*  
that tumble homes and topple halls like toys!  
Young Thúc, who squandered money with both hands,  
could spend his all on one seductive smile.  
The bawd would sleek Kiều's hair, would paint her face—  
the stench of coins excites the blood with greed.

1300

For summer cuckoos cried beneath the moon:  
above the wall pomegranates kindled fire.  
Now, in her chamber, at a leisureed hour,  
she dropped the curtain for an orchid bath.  
Lo, such pure jade and such white ivory!  
Her body stood as Heaven's masterwork.  
He gazed and gazed—transported with delight,  
he sang his love and penned a T'ang poem.\*

1310

"I'm glad to know your sentiments," she said.  
"Each word is pearl or jade, each line brocade.  
Clever or not, I owe you my reply—\*  
homesickness, though, gives thoughts that hold me back.  
My heart still dwells beneath those golden clouds.\*  
No answer will your poem get today."

1315

"You're talking in the strangest way," he said.  
"But are you not an offshoot from her stock?"  
More gloom now dimmed the sparkle of her eyes—  
the sense of her ill fate struck her with grief:  
"I'm just a flower fallen from its branch,  
and you're the butterfly that flits and flirts.  
No doubt, my lord keeps his own wedded wife.\*  
why waste our brief few days on idle chat?"

1320

"Since we have known each other," he replied,  
"my heart has nursed for you a steadfast love.\*  
But if we plan to live as lifelong mates,\*  
I must retrace the stream to its own source."  
"I humbly thank you for the thought," she said.  
"But I fear snags on both your side and mine.

1325

1330

“Binh-khang nẵn-ná bãy lâu, “yêu hoa yêu được một màu diêm-trang. “Rồi ra lạt phẩn phai hương, lòng kia giữ được thường-thường mài chāng? “Vá trong thêm quẽ cung trảng, chú-trương đành dâ chí Hằng ở trong. “Bãy lâu khääng-khit dài đồng, thêm người người cùng chia lòng riêng-tây. “Vé chi chút phận béo-mây, lâm cho bê ái khi đây khi vời. “Trâm diêu ngang-ngéra vi tôi, thân sau ai chịu tội trời ầy cho? “Như chàng có vững tay co, mười phần cùng dấp-diêm cho một vài. “Thê trong dầu lớn hơn ngoài, trước hảm sur-tứ gửi người dâng-la. “Cùi dầu luôn xuông mái nhà, giảm chua lại tội bằng ba lửa nồng. “Ở trên còn có nhà thông, lượng trên trông xuống biết lòng có thương? “Sá chi liễu ngô hoa tường? Lầu xanh lại bỏ ra phường lầu xanh. “Lại càng dơ dâng đại hình, đành thân-phận thiếp ngại danh-giá chàng. “Thương sao cho vẹn thi thương. Tính sao cho trọn mọi đường xin vâng.”	1335 1340 1345 1350 1355 1360 1365 1370
“Cùng nhau cản-vận đèn diêu, chí non thê bê nặng gieo đèn lời. Ni-non đêm ngắn tinh dài, ngoài hiên thô dà non doi ngâm gương. Mượn diêu trúc-viện thừa-lương, tước vã hay tạm giấu nắng một nơi. Chiến hòa sắp sẵn hai bài, cây tay thấy-thợ mượn người dò-la.	

If you have lingered in the house of mirth,* you love this rose for its fair hue alone. Someday its bloom will fade, its scent will fail— will you still keep for me a constant heart? What's more, within the threshold of your home, a mistress is already wielding sway.*	1335 1340 1345 1350 1355 1360 1365 1370
Till now the marriage bond has tied you two: another woman will divide your love. A drifting cloud, a floating fern, am I to drain your fond affection from your spouse?*	1340
Should things go topsy-turvy thanks to me, on whom will later fall high Heaven's scourge? If with firm hand you hold the helm and steer, you may protect me, shield me, now and then. But if the lady lords it over you,*	1345
I shall be tossed to her, your lioness.*	1350
Under your roof I'll have to cringe and crawl— her vinegar will burn worse than hell's own fire!*	1355
Above your wife there is your father, too: will he bestow some pity on this girl? How can he love the rose picked off a wall?*	1360
He'll send the harlot back to harlotdom.* With yet more dirt and filth I'll learn to live— but what I'm mindful of is your good name. If you love me, please keep our love intact. See that there's no loose end and I'll obey.”	1365
He said: “You speak with such a wary tongue! Are they two strangers still, your heart and mine? Think not of things as far as Wu or Laos:*	1370
depend on me to work all matters out. I'm near you—do they count, all risks remote? I've sworn my troth—I'll brave the winds and waves!” *	
The two exchanged all secrets of their souls, pledging their troth in sight of sea and hills. The night was much too short for love refrains: the moon had sunk behind the western heights.*	
He feigned to take Kiều out for some fresh air among bamboos and hid her at a place. Now he prepared to wage both war and peace, seeking tacticians, asking help from spies.	

Bản tin đèn mặt Tú-bà,  
thua cơ mụ cùng cầu hòa dám sao.

Rò-ràng của dǎn tay trao,  
hoàn-lương một thiếp thân vào cửa công.

Công tư hai lè đều xong,  
gót tiên phút dà thoát vòng trán-ai.

Một nhà sum-hop trúc-mai,  
cảng sáu nghìn bể cảng dài tinh sông.

Hương càng đượm lứa càng nồng,  
cảng sỏi vè ngọc cảng lồng màu sen.

Nửa năm hời-tiềng vừa quen,  
sân ngô cảnh biếc dà chen lá vàng.

Giệu thu vừa nẩy giờ sương,  
gôi yên dà thây xuân-dường đèn nơi.

Phong-lôi nỗi trận bời-bời,  
nặng lòng e-ăp tình bài phân-chia.

Quyết ngay biện-bạch một bể,  
dạy cho má phần lại vẽ lầu xanh.

Thầy lời nghiêm-huẫn rành-rành,  
đánh liêu sinh mới lầy tinh nài-kêu.

Rắng: "Con biết tội dà nhiều,  
"dẫu rằng sầm-sét búa-riù cùng cam.

"Trót vi tay dà nhúng chàm,  
"dại rồi còn biết khôn lâm sao đây.

"Cùng nhau vá tiềng một ngày,  
"ôm cảm ai nờ dứt dây cho đánh.

"Lượng trên quyết chẳng thương tinh,  
"bạc-den thôi có tiếc minh làm chi."

Thầy lời sắt-dá tri-tri,  
sốt gan ông mời cáo qui cửa công.

Dắt băng nỗi sóng dùng-dùng,  
phú-đường sai lá phiêu hồng thôi-tra.

Cùng nha u theo gót sai-nha,  
song-song vào trước sân hoa lạy qui.

Trông lên mặt sắt den si,  
lập-nghiêm trước dà ra uy nặng lời:

"Gà kia dại nết chơi-bời,  
"mà con người thê là người dong-dura.  
"Tuống chí hoa thái hương thừa,

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Then he sent word confronting that Dame Tú—  
she, outmaneuvered, could but sue for terms.

He paid the ransom into her own hands  
and notified the law of Kiều's release.

Once he had settled with both laws and men,  
she soon escaped the circle of her woes.

As lovers joined their lives beneath one roof,\*  
their love grew deeper, deeper than the sea.

Like fire and incense, mutual passion burned—  
her jade-and-lotus beauty gleamed and glowed.

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For half a year they lived as intimates.

Now, in the courtyard, planes mixed gold with jade.  
Along the hedge, frost-hardy mums peeped out.  
And lo, the father came a-riding back.\*

He stormed and thundered in his towering wrath—  
filled with concern, he thought to split the pair.  
Determined, he passed judgment straightaway:  
in her old whorehouse he'd put back the whore.\*

The father's verdict was clear-cut, forthright—  
yet, making bold, the son entreated him:

"I know my many crimes—if thunderbolts  
or hatchet blows strike me, I'll die content.  
But now my hand has dipped in indigo:\*

a fool grown wise still can't undo what's done.  
Even if I had her for just one day,  
who'd hold a lute and then rip off its strings?"

If you will not relent and grant me grace,  
I'd rather lose my life than play her false."

Those stubborn words aroused the old man's bile,  
so at the hall of law he lodged complaint.  
Over a peaceful earth the waves now surged—  
the prefect sent a warrant for the pair.  
They walked behind the sheriff, then at court  
they fell upon their knees, still side by side.

They raised their eyes and saw an iron mask—  
the prefect, strutting power, spoke harsh words:  
"Young wastrel, you have had your foolish fling—  
and she, that slut, is nothing but a cheat.  
A cast-off rose with all its scent gone stale,

“mượn màu son-phấn đánh lừa con đen.	
“Suy trong tinh-trạng bên nguyên,	1415
“bẽ nào thi cùng chưa yên bẽ nào.	
“Phép công chiêu án luận vào.	
“Có hai đường ấy muôn sao mạc minh.	
“Một là cứ phép gia-hình,	
“hai là lại cứ lâu xanh phò vẽ.”	1420
Nàng rằng: “Đã quyết một bẽ!	
“Nhện này vương lầy tơ kia mây lẩn.	
“Đục trong thân cũng là thân.	
“Yêu-thơ váng chịu trước sân lôi-dinh!”	
Dạy rằng: “Cứ phép gia-hình!”	1425
Ba cây chập lại một cành mầu-đơn.	
Phận đánh chi dám kêu oan,	
đảo hoen-quyện má liễu tan-tác mày.	
Một sân lấm-cát đâ đầy,	
gương lờ nước thủy mai gãy vóc sương.	1430
Nghi tình chàng Thúc mà thương,	
néo xa trông thấy lòng càng xót-xa.	
Khóc rằng: “Oan-khóc vì ta!	
“Có nghe lời trước chẳng dâ lụy sau.	
“Cạn lòng chẳng biết nghì sâu.	1435
“Để ai trang túi hoa sầu vi ai.”	
Phú-đường nghe thoáng vào tai,	
động lòng lại gạn dền lời riêng-tây.	
Sụt-sùi chàng mới thưa ngay,	1440
đầu đuối kẽ lại sự ngây cầu thân:	
“Nàng đâ tinh hết xa gần,	
“từ xưa nàng đâ biết thân có rày.	
“Tại tôi hưng lây một tay,	
“đè nàng cho dền nỗi này vì tôi.”	
Nghe lời nói cùng thương lời,	1445
dẹp uy mới dạy cho bài giải vi.	
Rắng: “Như hắn có thê thì	
“tráng-hoa song cùng thị-phi biết diếu.”	
Sinh rằng: “Chút phận bợt-bèo,	
“theo-dỏi và cùng ít nhiều bút-nghiên.”	1450
Cười rằng: “Đã thê thì nên!	
“Mộc-già hãy thử một thiên trình nghệ.”	
Nàng vâng cất bút tay đẽ,	

she's put on rouge and powder, duping boors.*	
To judge the state of things from his complaint,	1415
it's out of joint with either one of you.	
I shall uphold the law and try the case.	
There are two paths—you're free to opt for which:	
either I'll mete out punishment by the book	
or to the whorehouse I'll remand the whore.”	1420
“Once and for all my mind's made up!” she cried.	
“The spider's web shall not catch me again.	
Muddy or clear, it's still my life to live.	
I shall endure the thunder of the law!”	
The judge declared: “The law be carried out!”	1425
A peony in shackles, cuffs, and cangue.*	
Resigned, she dared not cry her innocence—	
tears stained her cheeks and pain knit tight her brows.	
Down on a floor of dust and mud, her face	
a tarnished glass, her frame a thin plum branch.	1430
Oh, poor young Thúc! Consider his sad plight:	
he watched her from afar, his entrails torn.	
“She suffers so because of me!” he moaned.	
“Had I but listened, she'd be spared this wrong.	
How ever can a shallow mind think deep?	1435
So now I've caused her all this grief and shame.”	
The judge had overheard young Thúc's lament—	
by pity moved, he asked for more details.	
At once the lover sobbed his story out,	
recounting all she'd said when he proposed:	1440
“She pondered what might happen, soon or late,	
aware that she herself could come to this.	
Because I chose to take it all in hand,	
I've brought this woe on her—it's my own fault.”	
The judge felt sorry when he heard those words—	1445
he smoothed his brow and figured some way out.	
“If what you've told me is the truth,” he said,	
“this harlot, after all, knows right from wrong.”*	
“Though just a lowly woman,” Thúc went on,	
“she's learned to ply the brush and scribble verse.”	
“But she must be perfection!” laughed the judge.	
“Well, write a piece, The Cangue, and strut your art.”	1450
The girl complied—she raised the brush and wrote,	

tiên hoa trình trước án phê xem tường.

Khen rằng: "Giá lợp Thịnh-Đường!  
"Tài này sắc ấy nghìn vàng chưa cân!

"Thật là tài-tứ gai-nhân,  
"Châu-Trần còn có Châu-Trần nào hơn?  
"Thôi đừng rước dù cừu hờn,  
"làm chi lờ nhịp cho đàn ngang cung.

"Đã đưa đèn trước cửa công,  
"ngoài thì là lý song trong là tình.  
"Dâu-con trong đạo gia-dinh,  
"thôi thi dẹp nỗi bất-bình là xong."

Kíp truyền sám-sára lễ công,  
kiệu hoa cất gió duoc hồng ruồi sao.

Bảy hàng cỏ-xúy xôn-xao,  
song-song đưa tới trường đào sảnh đôi.

Thương vì hạnh trọng vi tài,  
Thúc-ông thôi cùng dẹp lời phong-ba.

Huệ-lan sực-nức một nhà,  
từng cay-đắng lại mặn-mà hơn xưa.

Máng vui rượu sớm cờ trưa,  
đào đà phai thắm sen vừa nảy xanh.

Trường hổ vắng-vé đêm thanh,  
e tinh nắng mới bảy tinh riêng chung:

"Phân bố từ vẹn chữ tòng,  
"đổi-thay nhạn én đã hỏng đầy niên.

"Tin nhà ngày một vắng tin.  
"Mẫn tình cát-lũy lạt tình tao-khang.

"Nghỉ ra thật cùng nên đường,  
"tâm-hơi ai kẽ giùr-giàng cho ta?

"Trộm nghe kẽ lớn trong nhà,  
"ở vào khuôn phép nói ra mỗi giùròng.

"E thay những dạ phi-thường!  
"Đê dò rộn bể khôn lường dây sông.

"Mà ta suýt một năm ròng,  
"thè nào cùng chẳng giàu xong được nào.

"Bảy chảy chura tó tiêu-hao,  
"hoặc là trong có làm sao chàng là?  
"Xin chàng kíp liệu lại nhà,  
"trước người đẹp ý sau ta biết tinh.

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then laid the sheet of paper on his desk.

"It tops the height of T'ang!" he cried in praise.\*

1455

"All gold on earth can't buy her gifts and charms.

The man of parts has met the woman fair:

a finer match could Chou and Ch'en have bred?\*

Let's put an end to all this fight and feud:

why sow discord and break a love duet?

1460

When people come before a court of law,

inside the rules of justice mercy dwells.

Your son's own mate belongs within your clan:

forget your own displeasure and forgive."

A wedding he decreed—wind-borne, took off  
the bridal carriage, torches raced the stars.\*

1465

A band of piping flutes and throbbing drums

led bride and groom to their connubial niche.

Old Thúc admired her virtues, prized her gifts—

from him no more harsh word or stormy scene.

1470

Lilies and orchids bathed their home in scents  
as bitter sorrow turned to sweeter love.

Time flew amidst delights of wine or chess:  
peach red had waned, now lotus green would wax.

1475

Behind their curtains, on a silent night,  
she felt misgivings, told him what she felt:

"Since this frail girl found her support in you,\*  
geese followed swallows—almost gone, a year.

Yet not a day's brought news from your own home.

1480

With your new bride, you've cooled toward your old mate.\*

It seems, upon reflection, rather odd:  
from talk and gossip who could have saved us?

1485

The mistress of your household—so I've heard—  
does what is proper, says what is correct.

Oh, how I dread all such uncommon souls!  
It's hard to plumb the ocean's pits and depths.

1485

We've lived together for these full twelve months—  
from her we could not have concealed the fact.

If for so long you've got no news of her,  
then something must be brewing in that hush.

1490

Now go back home immediately, I beg you:  
you'll please her and we'll know what's in her mind.

"Vì bỗng giữ mực giấu quanh,  
"rày lẩn mai lừa như hình chưa thông."

Nghe lời khuyên-nhú thong-dong,  
đành lòng sinh mới quyết lòng hối-trang.  
Rạng ra gửi đèn xuân-đường,  
Thúc-ông cùng với giục chàng ninh-gia.

Tiễn-đưa một chén quan-hà,  
xuân-đinh thoát đã dạo ra Cao-đinh.

Sông Tần một dải xanh-xanh,  
toi-thoi bờ liễu mây cảnh Dương-quan.

Cầm tay dài thở vắn than,  
chia-phôi ngừng chén hợp-tan nghẹn lời.

Nàng rắng: "Non-nước xa khơi.  
"Sao cho trong ấm thi ngoại mới êm.

"Để lòi yêm thảm trôn kim?  
"Làm chi bụng mắt bắt chim khó lòng.

"Đồi ta chút nghĩa đèo-bồng,  
đèn nhà trước liệu nói sòng cho minh.

"Đầu khi sống-giò bắt-bình,  
lòn ra uy lòn tội đành phận tội.

"Hơn điêu giấu ngực giấu xuôi,  
lại mang những việc tày trời đèn sau.

"Thương nhau xin nhớ lời nhau.  
"Năm ch้าย cùng chặng đi đâu mà ch้าย.

"Chén đưa nhớ bùa hôm nay,  
chén mừng xin đợi ngày này năm sau."

Người lên ngựa kè chia bào,  
rừng phong thu đã nhuộm màu quan-san.

Dặm hồng bụi cuồn chinh-an,  
trông người đã khuất mây ngàn dâu xanh.

Người về chiếc bóng nằm canh,  
kè đi muôn dặm một mình xa-xôi.

Vắng trăng ai xé làm đôi?  
Nửa in gối chiếc nửa soi dặm trường.

Ké chi những nỗi dọc đường?  
Buồng trong này nỗi chủ-trương ở nhà.

Võn dòng họ Hoạn danh-gia,  
con quan Lại-bộ tên là Hoạn-thư.  
Duyên Dâng thuận néo gió đưa,

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If you drag out this game of hide-and-seek  
and put off telling her, it just won't work."

He heard those words of counsel, said with calm,  
and braced himself to think of going home.  
Next day he spoke to Father of his plans—\*  
the old man, too, urged him to make the trip.

To bid farewell and share the stirrup cup,  
they left their sweet love nest for Mount Kao-t'ing.\*  
The Ch'in stretched off a ribbon of pale blue—\*  
along the bank, some willows waved goodbye.\*  
They moaned, still holding hands—they left untouched  
the parting cup and choked on parting words.

"The hills and streams will sunder us," she said.

"But peace must reign at home to reign abroad.\*

One sees a needle's eye if no red scarf.\*

Blindfolded, who will try to catch a bird?\*

A rather fragile bond now ties us two:

at home, spell it all out, make it all clear.

Should she, displeased, object and raise a storm,  
tell her I know my place and honor hers.

Far better thus than try to cover up  
and only hatch more mischief afterwards.

If you love me, remember what I say.

A year is quite some time, but it will pass—  
To mourn this day, let's drain the parting cup—  
our cup of joy we'll drink twelve months from now."

He climbed his horse, she let go of his gown—  
autumn was tinging maple woods with gloom.\*  
And off he rode as clouds of dust swirled up,  
to vanish past all those green mulberry groves.  
She walked back home to face the night alone,  
and by himself he fared the long, long way.  
Who split the lovers' moon? Half stayed and slept  
by her lone pillow, half lit his far road.

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Why tell what our wayfaring man went through?  
Let's talk about the mistress of his hearth.

Known as Miss Hoạn, she wore a great clan name:\*

her father ruled the Civil Office Board.\*  
On happy winds of chance Thúc had met her,\*

cùng chàng kết tóc xe tơ những ngày.

Ô-an thì nết cùng hay,  
nói điều ràng-buộc thi tay cùng già.

Tử nghe vườn mới thêm hoa,  
miệng người dâ lâm tin nhà thi không.  
Lứa tâm cảng dập cảng nồng,  
trách người den-bạc ra lòng trāng-hoa:

"Vi bắng thù thât cùng ta,  
"cùng dung ké dưới mới là lượng trên.

"Đại chi cháng giữ lây nén,  
"tốt chi mà rước tiếng ghen vào mình.

"Lại còn bung-bit giấu quanh,  
"làm chi những thói trẻ ranh nực cười.

"Tinh rằng cách mặt khuất lời.  
"Giấu ta ta cũng liệu bài giấu cho.

"Lo gi việc ấy mà lo,  
"kiên trong miệng chén có bò đi đâu?

"Làm cho nhìn cháng được nhau.  
"Làm cho đầy-dọa cát đầu cháng lên.

"Làm cho trông thầy nhân-tiễn,  
"cho người thám ván bán thuyền biêt tay."

Nỗi lòng kín cháng ai hay,  
ngoài tai để mặc gió bay mé ngoài.

Tuần sau bỗng thấy hai người,  
mách tin ý cũng liệu bài tâng công.

Tiểu-thư nói giận dùng-dùng:  
"Góm tay thêu-dệt ra lòng trêu ngươi!

"Chồng tao nào phải như ai,  
"điều này hán miệng những người thị-phi."

Vội-vàng xuõng lệnh ra uy,  
dứa thi và miệng dứa thi bé răng.

Trong ngoại kín mít như bưng,  
nào ai còn dám nói-nặng một lời.

Buồng đáo khuya sớm thánh-thơi,  
ra vào một mực nói cười như không.

Dêm ngày lòng những giận lòng,  
sinh đà vể đèn lầu hồng xuõng yên.

Lời tan-hợp nói hàn-huyên,  
chữ tình càng mặn chữ duyên càng nồng.

Tây-trần vui chén thong-dong,

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and they had tied the nuptial knot long since.  
Living above reproach, Miss Hoạn could wield  
the surest hand in catching one at fault.

His garden boasted now a fresh-blown rose—  
so she had heard from every mouth but his.  
The fire of wrath kept smoldering in her breast  
against the knave whose fickle heart had roamed.\*

"If only he'd confessed, told me the truth,  
I might have favored her with my good grace.

I'd be a fool to lose my stately calm  
and gain the stigma of a jealous shrew.

But he's thought fit to pull his boyish prank  
and hide his open secret—what a farce!

He's fancied distance keeps me unaware.  
Let's hide and seek—I too shall play his game.

I entertain no worry on this score:  
the ant's inside the cup—where can it crawl?\*

I'll make them loathe and shun each other's sight.  
I'll crush her so she cannot rear her head.

I'll rub the spectacle in his bare face  
and make the traitor feel my iron hand."\*

She locked her anger deep inside her heart  
and let all rumors breeze right past her ears.  
Later, two louts came bearing their report,  
hoping to earn due wages for their pains.

The lady in high dudgeon thundered forth:  
"I loathe the pert knaves who'll weave, embroider things!  
My husband's not a common, vulgar churl:

mouths with less truth than froth have spat this lie."

She bade her lackeys execute her law,  
slapping their mouths and knocking out their teeth.

An awestruck hush now settled on her house:  
nobody risked another single peep.

In her pink room she'd idle morn and eve,

she'd chat and laugh as if naught were amiss.

While in her bosom, night and day, she seethed,  
lo, he came home, alighting from his horse.  
They spoke their joy, inquired each other's health—  
their love revived, their ardor blazed again.

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nỗi lòng ai ở trong lòng mà ra.

Chàng về xem ý-tứ nhà,  
sự minh cùng rắp lán-la giải-bày.

Mấy phen cười nói tinh say,  
tóc-tơ bất-dộng mấy-may sự-tinh.

Nghĩ: “Đá bụng kín miêng bình.  
“Nào ai có kháo mà mình lại xưng?”

Những là e-ăp dùng-dắng,  
rút dây sợi nứa động rừng lại thôi.

Có khi vui chuyện mua cười,  
tiêu-thư lại giờ những lời đâu-đâu.

Rằng: “Trong ngọc đá vàng thau,  
“mười phần ta dà tin nhau cá mười.

“Khen cho những miệng đồng-dái,  
“bướm-ong lại đặt những lời nợ kia!

“Thiếp dẫu vụng chẳng hay suy,  
“dà dơ bụng nghĩ lại bia miệng cười.”

Thầy lời thủng-thinh như chơi,  
thuận lời chàng cùng nói xuôi đờ đòn.

Những là cười phần cợt son,  
đèn khuya chung bóng trăng tròn sánh vai.

Thú quê thuần, úc bén mùi,  
giêng vàng đã rung một vài lá ngô.

Chạnh niềm nhớ cánh giang-hồ,  
một màu quan-tái bỗn mùa gió-trăng.

Tinh riêng chưa dám rì ràng,  
tiêu-thư trước dà liệu chừng nhủ qua:

“Cách năm mây bạc xa-xa,  
“Lâm-tri cùng phái tinh mà thần-hôn.”

Được lời như cời tặc son!

Vó câu thẳng ruồi nước-non quê người.

Long-lanh dây nước in trời,  
thành xây khói biếc non phơi bóng vàng.

Roi câu vừa gióng đậm trường,  
xe hương nàng cùng thuận đường qui-ninh.

Thưa nhả huyên hèn mọi tình,  
nỗi chàng ở bac nỗi mình chịu đen:

“Nghĩ rằng ngứa ghê hòn ghen,  
“xấu chàng mà có ai khen chi minh.

“Vậy nên ngánh mặt làm thinh,

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but who could read what in their hearts each felt?

He had come home to sound his wife's intent  
and, bit by bit, reveal the truth to her.

Yet, gay or sober, as she talked and laughed,  
she would not drop one hint of his affair.

“So far I've kept my mouth shut tight,” he thought.\*  
“Why should I squeal when no one's sticking me?” \*

He wavered, shilly-shallied all the while,  
afraid to pull a vine and shake the woods.\*

At times, as back and forth they bandied jokes,  
the lady would let fall some vague remark:

“True love sorts jade from stone and gold from brass:  
between us two has grown a perfect trust.

Praise be to all those tongues which spin long yarns:  
they've peddled tales of your so-called amours.\*

Had reason failed me, I'd have fouled my mind  
believing them, become a laughingstock.”

Since she put it in casual, bantering tones,  
he played along to parry blows and thrusts.  
They dallied, blending shadows by the lamp  
or snuggling cheek to cheek beneath the moon.

To perch and fish-cress he'd begun to take\*  
when down the well planes dropped a few gold leaves.

His soul recalled the world beyond the pass  
where for four seasons he had loved and lived.  
Before he could make bold to breathe a word,  
the lady guessed his mind and offhand said:\*

“A year has gone since you left those white clouds:\*

regain Lin-tzu and care for your old sire.” \*

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Her words unknit a knot within his breast!  
His horse flew him across strange streams and hills:  
waters, all gleaming, mirrors for the sky,  
walls wreathed in sapphire mist, peaks gilt with sun.

The moment he had cracked his whip and left,  
she boarded her own coach to see her kin.

Chapter and verse, she told her mother all,\*  
how he'd played false and how she'd borne her wrong:

“A jealous tantrum's like an itch, I thought:\*

it shames the man, it earns the wife no praise.  
So I kept mum and looked the other way.

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"mưu cao vồn dâ rắp-ranh nhùng ngày.  
"Lâm-tri đường bộ tháng chầy,  
"mà đường hái-dạo sang ngay thì gần.  
"Đợn thuyền lừa mặt gia-nhân,  
"hày dem dây xích buộc chân nàng vế.  
"Lâm cho cho mệt cho mê,  
"lâm cho đau-dớn è-chề cho coi!  
"Trước cho bò ghét nhùng người.  
"sau cho để một trò cười vế sau."  
Phu-nhân khen chước rất mẫu,  
chiểu con mời dạy mặc dầu ra tay.  
Sú-sang buồm gió lèo mây,  
Khuyên Ưng lại chọn một bầy côn-quang.  
Dận-dở hết các mọi đường,  
thuận-phong một lá vượt sang bến Tế.

Nàng từ chiếc bóng song the,  
đường kia nỗi nọ như chia mồi sầu:  
"Bóng đâu dâ xê ngang đâu,  
"biết đâu ấm-lanh biết đâu ngọt-bùi?  
"Tóc thê dâ châm ngang vai,  
"nào lời non-nước nào lời sắt-son?  
"Sắn-bìm chút phận côn-con,  
"khuôn duyên biết có vuông-tròn cho chàng?  
"Thân sao nhiều nỗi bất-bằng?  
"Liêu như cung Quảng á Hàng nghĩ nao!"  
Đêm thu gió lọt song đào,  
nửa vầng trăng khuyết ba sao giữa trời.  
Nén hương đèn trước thiền-dài,  
nỗi lòng khẽn chúa cạn lời vân-vân.  
dưới hoa dạ lù ác-nhân.  
Ấm-Ấm khẽ kinh thán mọc ra.  
Đãy sân gươm tuột sáng lòa,  
thắt-kinh nàng chúa biết là làm sao.  
Thuốc mê đâu dâ tười vào.  
mơ-máng như giấc chiêm-bao biết gi.  
Vực ngay lên ngựa tức-thi,  
phỏng đào viện sách bồn bể lừa dong.  
Sẵn thấy vô-chú bên sông,  
dem vào để đó lộn sóng ai hay.

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but I already had my plan laid down.  
By land it takes a month to reach Lin-tzu—  
by sea, though, one will get there soon enough.  
I've picked some trusted lads to man a boat,  
go there and bring her back, with feet in chains.  
Then I'll drive her out of her mind and wits.  
I'll torture her for all the world to see.  
First I'll discharge my spite on both, and next  
I'll make of both a mockery for all time." 1620  
"A master scheme," her mother praised the plot—  
she humored her and left her free to act.  
A vessel was rigged up with sails and yards;  
two lackeys, Hound and Hawk, recruited thugs.  
After the crew was told what they should do,  
before the wind the boat set sail for Ch'i.\* 1625

As Kiều sat by her window, all alone,  
mixed threads of gloom ran crisscross in her soul:  
"Their sun is setting, hanging at head's height.\*  
have they warm clothes, do they eat well or ill?  
The hair I clipped has reached my shoulders now:  
what has become of all my vows of troth?  
A clinging ivy—that's my humble lot.\*  
will Heaven bless or curse this marriage tie?  
Why have all wrongs and woes befallen me?  
Oh, to live safe like Ch'ang-o in her hall!"\* 1630

An autumn night—through windows wafts of breeze;  
high in the sky, a crescent moon, three stars.\*  
To Heaven's altar she brought incense sticks.  
She was still pouring out her heart in prayer 1640  
when from the shrubs a wicked band sprang out  
and screamed like devils spewed by hell itself.  
The courtyard was all gleaming with drawn swords.  
Frightened, she still knew not what was afoot.  
On her they sprayed a drug inducing drowsy,  
which left her senseless, slumbering in a dream.  
They picked her up, placed her astride a horse,  
then set on fire his library, her own room.  
Beside the river lay a corpse, unclaimed:  
they dragged it in, left it there in her stead. 1645

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Tôi-dời phách lạc hồn bay,  
pha cán bụi có gốc cây ẩn mình.

Thúc-ông nhà cũng gần quanh,  
chợt trông ngọn lửa thắt-kinh rụng-rời.

Tớ thấy chạy thẳng đèn nời,  
tới-bời tưới lửa tim người lao-xao.

Gió cao ngọn lửa càng cao.  
tôi-dời tim đú nàng nào thấy đâu.

Hót-hot hót-hái nhìn nhau,  
giêng sâu bụi rậm trước sau tim quang.

Chạy vào chôn cù phòng hương,  
trong tro thấy một đồng xương cháy tàn.

Ngay tinh ai biết mưu gian?  
Hắn nàng thôi lại còn bàn rẳng ai.

Thúc-ông sùi-sụt ngắn dài,  
nghỉ con vắng-vé thương người nết-na.

Di-hái nhật sắp về nhà,  
nào lá khâm-liệm nào là tang-trai.

Lễ thường đá đú một hai,  
lục-trinh chàng cùng đèn nời bấy giờ.

Bước vào chôn cù lầu thơ,  
tro-than một đồng nắng-mưa bồn tường.

Sang nhà cha tời trung-đường,  
linh-sàng bài vị thờ nắng ở trên.

Hời ôi nói hết sự-duyên.

Tơ tinh đứt ruột lửa phiến cháy gan.

Gieo mình vật-vã khóc-than:

“Con người thè ây thác oan thè này!

“Chắc rắng mai trúc lại vầy.

“ai hay vinh-quyết là ngày đưa nhau?”

Thương cảng nghỉ nghỉ cảng đau,  
dè ai rắp thảm quạt sâu cho khuây?

Gắn miễn nghe có một thấy,  
phi phù trú qui cao tay thông-huyền.

Trên tam-dảo dưới círu-tuyễn,  
tim đau thi cùng biết tin rõ-ràng.

Sám-sanh lẽ-vật rướt sang,  
xin tìm cho thây mặt nàng hồi-han.

Đạo-nhân phục trước tinh-dàn,  
xuất-thần giây-phút chưa tàn nén hương.

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The servants, from whom terror had chased wits,  
sought cover dashing into shrubs and groves.

Old Thúc, whose house was in the neighborhood,  
was struck with panic seeing flames shoot up.

Master and men all hurried to the spot  
to quench the roaring blaze and search for Kiều.

As rose the wind, so higher rose the flames.  
The servants looked and looked—of her no trace.

Wild-eyed and frenzied, they all scuttled round  
to peer at random into shrubs and wells.

They fought their way and reached her inner room:  
they saw a heap of cinders, bones charred black.

Meaning no evil, who suspects foul play?  
They took it to be Kiều and no one else.

Old Thúc broke into sobs and tears—he mourned  
the virtuous mate his absent son had lost.

He had the ashes gathered and brought home,  
then shrouded, coffined, and consigned to earth.  
All funeral rites for Kiều had been performed  
when overland, at length, young Thúc came back.

Where they'd hummed verse he now stepped in to find  
a pile of cinders, four rain-beaten walls.

He rushed to Father's place—in the middle room,  
an altar had her tablet set thereon.\*

Alas, the tragedy he was told in full.  
Love tore his heart and anguish burned his soul.

He rolled upon the ground, he wept and moaned:  
“That death for such a woman, what a wrong!

I was so sure we two would meet again—\*

who could have known we said adieu for good?”

Love wakened thoughts, and thoughts aroused more pain—

who could stamp out his sorrow, quench his grief?

He learned that near those parts a shaman lived,  
who summoned spirits, knowing their dark realm.  
On the Three Isles or down by the Nine Springs,\*  
he'd trace the whereabouts of all dead souls.

Young Thúc sent gifts and called the psychic in:  
he bade him look for her, inquire her fate.

Before the altar, down the shaman knelt.  
He kindled incense sticks, fell into trance.

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Trở về minh-bạch nói tường:  
 "Mặt nàng chẳng thấy việc nàng đã tra.  
 "Người này nặng nghiệp oan-gia,  
 còn nhiều nợ lâm sao dà thác cho.  
 "Mệnh-cung đang mắc nan to,  
 "một năm nùa mới thảm-dò được tin.  
 "Hai bên giáp mặt chiến-chiến,  
 "muôn nhìn mà chẳng dám nhìn lạ thay!"  
 Nghe lời nói là đường này,  
 sự nàng đã thè lời thấy dám tin.  
 Chẳng qua đồng-cốt quâng-xiên,  
 người đâu mà lại thấy trên cõi trần?  
 Tiếc hoa những ngậm-ngùi xuân,  
 thân này dè lại mây lẩn gặp tiên.

Nước trôi hoa rụng đã yên,  
 hay đâu địa-ngục ở miển nhân-gian.  
 Khuyên Ưng đã đất mưu gian,  
 vực nàng đưa xuống dè an dưới thuyền.  
 Buồm cao leo thẳng cánh suyễn,  
 dè chừng huyền Tích băng miền vượt sang.  
 Dờ dò lên trước sảnh-dường,  
 Khuyên Ưng hai đứa nộp nàng dâng công.  
 Vực nàng tạm xuống môn-phòng,  
 hãy còn thiêm-thiệp giấc nồng chưa phai.  
 Hoàng-lương chợt tính hồn mai,  
 cửa-nhà đâu mất lâu-dài nào dây?  
 Bảng-hoàng dở tính dở say,  
 sảnh-dường mang tiếng đòi ngay lên hầu.  
 A-hoàn trên dưới giục mau,  
 hài-hùng nàng mới theo sau một người.  
 Ngọc trông tòa rộng dày dài,  
 Thiên Quan Trung Tề có bài treo trên.  
 Ban ngày sáp thấp hai bên,  
 giữa giường thất-báo ngồi trên một bà.  
 Gạn-gừng ngọt hỏi ngành tra,  
 sự minh nàng phái cứ mà giri-thura.  
 Bất-tinh nổi trận mây-mưa,  
 mang rắng: "Những giông bơ-thờ quen thân!  
 "Con này chẳng phải thiện-nhân,

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When he revived, he made a clear report:  
 "I did not see her face but learned her fate.  
 A karma of dire woe still weighs on her—  
 with debts unpaid, how can she die as yet?  
 Her star does indicate she's in distress,  
 but you must wait a year for news of her.  
 And when you two stand face to face again,  
 how strange, you will avoid each other's eyes!"

When Thúc was told so weird a prophecy,  
 dared he believe such tidings of her fate?  
 It was rank hocus-pocus, nothing more.  
 Where could he hope to see her in this world?  
 He mourned his flower, bewailed their joys of spring:  
 how often does one meet a nymph on earth?

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The fallen rose had washed downstream, he thought—  
 he knew not she had found her hell on earth.  
 Once Hound and Hawk had brought their scheme to pass,  
 they carried Kiều aboard and laid her down.  
 And then, all sails unfurled and halyards taut,  
 the skiff raced forth and crossed the waves for Hsi.

They landed, made straight for the palace where  
 they turned Kiều in to earn their due reward.  
 To servants' quarters she was carried off  
 while she still lay unconscious, deep in sleep.  
 Then, with a jolt, she wakened from her drowse:  
 her home had vanished—whose mansion was this here?

Half conscious, half asleep, she fumbled yet  
 when a loud call came from the audience room.  
 Housemaids rushed up to urge her prompt response—  
 in mortal dread, she followed one of them.

Her eyes glanced up and saw a stately hall,  
 inscribed above: "Heaven's Prime Minister."  
 And candles burned in broad day, right and left.  
 There on a couch a lady sat enthroned.\*  
 She queried Kiều, she probed her, root and branch—  
 Kiều dutifully answered, told her life.

A storm of fury burst upon her head:  
 "But you're one of those vagabonds past all shame!  
 This wench is no good, decent woman, no!

"chẳng phường trồn chúa thì quân lộn chống.  
"Ra tuồng mèo má gá đống.  
"ra tuồng lúng-túng chẳng xong bẽ nào.  
"Đã dem mình bán cùa tao,  
"lại còn khùng-khính làm cao thế này.  
"Nào là gia-pháp nọ bay!  
"Hãy cho ba chục biết tay một lần."  
A-hoàn trên dưới dà rân,  
dẫu rằng trăm miệng khôn phân lè nào.  
Trúc-côn ra sức đập vào,  
thịt nào chẳng nát gan nào chẳng kinh.  
Xót thay đáo-lý một cảnh,  
một phen mưa-gió tan-tành một phen.  
Hoa-nô truyền dạy đổi tên,  
buông the dạy ép vào phiên thị-ti.  
Ra vào theo lù thanh-y,  
dài-dầu tóc rối da chi quần bao.  
Quần-gia có một mụ nào,  
thầy người thầy nết ra vào mà thương.  
Khi ché-chén khi thuốc-thang,  
đem lời phuong-tiện mờ đường hiều-sinh.  
Dạy rằng: "May-rúi đã đánh,  
"liều-bồ minh giữ lây minh cho hay.  
"Cũng là oan-nghiệp chí đây,  
"sa cơ mới đèn thế này chẳng dung.  
"Ở đây tai vách mạch dừng.  
"Thầy ai người cũ cùng dừng nhìn chi.  
"Kéo khi sâm-sét bắt-kỳ,  
"con ong cái kiền kêu gì được oan?"  
Nàng càng giọt ngọc như chan,  
nỗi lòng luồng những bàn-hoàn niềm tây:  
"Phong-trấn kiếp chịu đà đầy,  
"lâm-than lại cò thử này bằng hai.  
"Phận sao bạc cháng vừa thôi,  
"khăng-khăng buộc mãi lây người hồng-nhan.  
"Đã dành túc-trái tiễn-oan,  
"cùng liều ngọc nát hoa tàn mà chi."  
Nhưng là nương-náu qua thi,  
tiêu-thư phái buổi mới về ninh-gia.  
Mẹ-con trò-chuyện lán-la,

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She must have fled her man, if not her lord.  
A graveyard cat! A hen that prowls the fields!\*  
You hemmed and hawed and could not clear yourself.  
I've bought you soul and body—you're my slave,  
and yet such airs and graces you display!  
Where are you lasses who enforce my law?  
Teach her a lesson—deal her thirty strokes!"

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"Yes, Ma'am!" all housemaids cried. A hundred tongues  
could not have helped poor Kiều defend herself.  
Sticks of bamboo belabored her—whose flesh  
would not break up, whose heart would fail to quake?  
Pity a spray of peach, a sprig of plum,  
once more exposed to storm and torn to shreds.

Flower, the slave—renamed by order, Kiều  
was now impressed to toil as lady's maid.  
She joined the ranks of servants garbed in blue,  
with hair unkempt and skin as dull as lead.

Among the servants there, a stewardess,  
observing Kiều's sweet ways, befriended her.  
She'd give Kiều tea or medicine for her wounds,  
and some advice on how to stay alive:  
"Accept whatever happens, good or ill—  
a reed, though, should take care of its frail self.\*  
Perhaps you must atone for some past sin,  
but malice brought you here, and not pure chance.  
Beware—around here walls have ears and eyes.\*  
If you see your old friend, you look away,  
or lightning bolts will strike you from the blue.  
When wronged, can flies and ants demand redress?" \*

Her tears, like pearls, kept rolling down Kiều's cheeks—  
foreboding brewed and stirred within her soul:  
"I've had an ample share of life's foul dust,  
and now this swamp of mud proves twice as vile.  
Will fortune never let its victims go  
but in its snares and toils hold fast a rose?  
I sinned in some past life and have to pay:  
I'll pay as flowers must fade and jade must break."

While Kiều was taking refuge there for now,  
one day Miss Hoạn came home to see her folks.  
Mother and daughter talked of this and that,

phu-nhân mới gọi nàng ra dạy lời:  
 "Tiêu-thư dưới trường thiêu người,  
 "cho về bên ấy theo đòi lầu trang."  
 Lãnh lời nàng mới theo sang,  
 biết đâu địa-ngục thiên-đường là đâu.  
 Sớm khuya khăn mặt lược đầu,  
 phận con hẫu giữ con hẫu dám sai.  
 Phái đêm êm-á chiêu trời,  
 trúc-tơ hói đèn nghẽ chơi mọi ngày.  
 Lành lời nàng mới lụa dây,  
 ní-non thánh-thót dẽ say lòng người.  
 Tiêu-thư xem cùng thương tai,  
 khuôn uy dường cùng bớt vài bồn phân.  
 Cứa người dày-dọa chút thân,  
 sớm nán-ní bóng đêm ân-hận lòng.  
 Lâm-tri chút nghĩa đèo-bỗng,  
 nước bèo đê chửi tương-phùng kiếp sau.  
 Bốn phương mây trắng một màu,  
 trông vời cõ-quốc biết đâu là nhà.  
 Lần-lần tháng trọn ngày qua,  
 nỗi gân não biết đường xa thề này.  
 Lâm-tri từ thuở uyên bay,  
 phòng không thương kẻ tháng ngày chiếc thân.  
 Mày ai trắng mời in ngắn,  
 phần thừa hương cũ bội phần xót-xa.  
 Sen tàn cúc lại nở hoa,  
 sầu dài ngày ngắn đông đà sang xuân.  
 Tim đâu cho thầy cõ-nhân?  
 Lấy câu vận-mệnh khuây dần nhờ-thương.  
 Chạnh niềm nhớ cảnh gia-hương,  
 nhớ quê chàng lại tìm đường thăm quê.  
 Tiêu-thư đón cửa giải-giě.  
 Hàn-huyên vừa cạn mọi bể gần xa,  
 nhà hương cao cuồn bức là,  
 phòng trong truyền gọi nàng ra lạy mừng.  
 Bước ra một bước một dừng,  
 trông xa nàng đã tỏ chừng néo xa:  
 "Phái rằng nắng quáng đèn lò,  
 "rõ-ràng ngồi đó chàng là Thúc-sinh?"

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and then the lady sent for Kiều to say:  
 "My daughter needs a slave to serve her wants:  
 I'll let you go and be her chambermaid."  
 Kiều followed her new mistress and set out,  
 bound for what hell or heaven she knew not.  
 Now, day or night, on hand with combs and towels,  
 she'd stand at beck and call, a model slave.  
 One evening, all was calm—the mistress asked  
 to hear Kiều play the lute, her love of yore.\*  
 She did as bid, plucked strings and spilled such drops  
 of music as poured liquor in the soul.  
 The lady seemed to like the lutanist's art:  
 her stern expression softened just a bit.  
 Within a stranger's gate Kiều slaved and lived,  
 confiding in her shadow or her heart.  
 To meet her Lin-tzu spouse again, she thought\*  
 she'd have to wait until some future life.  
 All heaven was one white expanse of clouds—  
 she peered far into space: where was her home?  
 While months reeled on, with worries close at hand,  
 could Thúc suspect what happened far away?  
 Since from Lin-tzu his lovebird had flown off,  
 an empty chamber kept a lonesome man.  
 He saw her eyebrow in the crescent moon,  
 breathed hints of old perfume and ached for her.  
 Just as the lotus wilts, the mums bloom forth—  
 time softens grief, and winter turns to spring.  
 Where could he find her he had once so loved?  
 He called it fate and duller throbbed his pain.  
 Nostalgia woke some yearning in his breast  
 and, sick for home, he made his long way back.  
 She met him at the gate, she gushed with joy.  
 Once they had traded news of health and such,  
 she had all drapes rolled up; then she bade Kiều  
 appear and greet the lord on his return.  
 As Kiều came out, she faltered at each step,  
 for from a distance she perceived the truth:  
 "Unless the sun and lights have tricked my eyes,  
 who else but my own Thúc is sitting there?"

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"Bây giờ tinh mới tỏ tinh, "thôi thôi đã mắc vào vành ch้าง sai. "Chước đâu có chước là đời? "Người đâu mà lại có người tinh-ma? "Rò-ràng thật lừa-dối ta, làm ra con ở chùa nhà đói nơi. "Bé ngoài thơm-thót nói cười, mà trong nham-hiem giết người không dao. "Bây giờ dắt thấp trời cao, ăn làm sao nói làm sao bây giờ?" Càng trông mặt càng ngắn-ngo, ruột tâm đói đoạn như tờ rỗi bời. Sợ uy dám ch้าง vàng lời, cùi đầu nèp xuồng sân mai một chiểu. Sinh dà phách lạc hồn xiêu: "Thương ôi ch้าง phái nàng Kiều ở đây? "Nhân làm sao đến thề này? "Thôi thôi ta đã mắc tay ai rồi!" Sợ quen dám hờ ra lời, khôn ngần giọt ngọc sụt-sùi nhô sa. Tiêu-thư trông mặt hối-trá: "Mới về có việc chi mà động dong?" Sinh rằng: "Hiếu-phục vừa xong, "suy lòng trắc-di đau lòng chung-thiên." Khen rằng: "Hiếu-tử dã nên! "Tây-trần mượn chén giải phiền đêm thu." Vợ-chồng chén tạc chén thù, bắt nàng đứng chực trì-hỗ hai nơi. Bắt khoan bắt nhật đèn lời, bắt qui tận mặt bắt mòn tận tay. Sinh càng như dại như ngây, giọt dài giọt ngắn chén đầy chén voi. Ngánh di chợt nói chợt cười, cáo say chàng đã giậm bài láng ra. Tiêu-thư vội thét: "Con Hoa! "Khuyên chàng ch้าง cạn thi ta có đòn." Sinh càng nát ruột tan hồn, chén mòn phai ngâm bõ-hồn ráo ngay. Tiêu-thư cười nói tinh say, chưa xong cuộc rượu lại bày trò chơi.	1810 1815 1820 1825 1830 1835 1840 1845
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So now I must confront the blatant fact: beyond all doubt, she's caught me in her trap. Could such a hellish plot be hatched on earth? Why has mankind so erred and bred a fiend? As bride and groom we two were duly joined— she splits us into slave and master now. The face displays sweet smiles, but deep inside the heart will scheme to kill without a knife. We stand as far apart as sky and earth: alas, what now to say, what now to do?" She grew bewildered gazing at his face, her heart a raveled knot of silken threads.* Too awed to disobey, she bowed her head and prostrated herself upon the floor. The husband was dismayed, at his wits' end: "Woe's me! But isn't she right here, my Kiều? What cause or reason led her to this plight? Alas, we're caught—and I know by whose hands!" Lest he'd betray himself, he'd breathe no word but could not stop his tears from spilling out. His lady fixed him with a glare and asked: "You just came home—why look so woebegone?" "I just took off my mourning," answered he. "I think of my lost mother and still grieve." ** She sang his praises: "What a loving son! Let's drink to your return, drown autumn gloom."	1810 1815 1820 1825 1830 1835 1840 1845
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Rằng: "Hoa-nô đú mọi tài, "bán dân thứ đạo một bài chàng nghe."	1850
Nàng đã tán-hoán tê-mê, vâng lời ra trước binh the vận đán.	
Bồn dây như khóc như than, khiến người trên tiệc cùng tan-nát lòng.	
Cùng chung một tiếng tơ-dỗng, người ngoài cười nụ người trong khóc thầm.	1855
Giọt châu lâ-châ khôn cầm, cui đầu chàng những gạt thầm giọt Tương.	
Tiêu-thư lại thét lây nàng: "Cuộc vui gây khúc đoan-trường ầy chi?	1860
"Sao chàng biết ý-túi gì? "Cho chàng buồn-bã tội thi tại người."	
Sinh càng thâm-thiết bối-hối, vội-vàng gượng nói gượng cười cho qua.	
Giọt rồng canh đã điểm ba, tiêu-thư nhìn mặt dường đà cam tâm.	1865
Lòng riêng khấp-khởi mừng thầm: "Vui này đã bồ đau ngầm xưa nay."	
Sinh thi gan héo ruột đầy, nỗi lòng càng nghĩ càng cay-dắng lòng.	1870
Người vào chung gối loan-phỏng, nâng ra tựa bóng đèn chong canh dài:	
"Bây giờ mới rõ tâm-hơi. "Máu ghen đâu có lạ đời nhà ghen!	
"Churóc đâu rè thủy chia uyên, "ai ra đường nầy ai nhìn được ai.	1875
"Bây giờ một vực một trời, "hết diều khinh-trọng hết lời thị-phi.	
"Nhé như bắc nặng như chí! "Gờ cho ra nợ còn gì là duyên?	
"Lờ-làng chút phận thuyền-quyên, "bé sáu sóng cả có tuyển được vay?"	1880
Một mình âm-í đêm cháy, địa dầu voi nước mắt đầy nấm canh.	
Sớm khuya hấu-hạ dài-dinh, tiêu-thư chạm mặt đê tình hói-tra.	1885
Lựa lời nàng mới thưa qua:	

She said: "That slave has mastered all the arts— she'll play the lute, treat you to some good piece."	1850
All dizzied, in a daze, Kiều bowed and sat before the thin gauze screen to tune the lute. Four strings together seemed to cry and moan in tones that wrenched him who was feasting there. Both heard the selfsame voice of silk and wood— she smiled and gloated while he wept within.	1855
When he could check his welling tears no more, he stooped his head and tried to wipe them off.* Again the mistress shouted at the slave: "Why play that doleful tune and kill our joy? Don't you give thought to anything you do? I'll punish you if you distress the lord."	1860
He waxed more frantic still—to lay the storm, he'd hurriedly attempt a laugh, a grin.	
The waterclock now marked the night's third watch—* the lady eyed their faces, looking pleased. She gloried in her soul: "This sweet revenge makes up for grief that festered in my breast." But shrunk with shame and choked with rage inside, he nursed a wound that rankled more and more.	1865
To share one pillow they regained their niche— Kiều huddled by her lamp, awake all night: "So now she has unveiled her own true face. How weird, that jealous humor in her blood! To split two lovebirds, she contrived it all— she'd part and tear us from each other's eyes.	1870
Now we're a gulf, a world apart—she's all, I'm nothing now; she's always right, I'm wrong. So gently it holds us, her iron hand!"*	1875
How can we struggle free and save our love? Frail woman that I was, I tripped and fell: shall I be rescued whole from furious waves?" Alone, she brooded far into the night— as ebbed the lampion's oil, her tears still flowed.	1880
Kiều served there day and night. Once, face to face, the mistress asked the servant how she fared. She chose her words with care, gave this reply:	1885

"Phái khi minh lại xót-xa nỗi mình."  
 Tiêu-thư hỏi lại Thúc-sinh:  
 "Cây chằng tra lầy thực-tình cho nao!"  
 Sinh đà rát ruột như bào,  
 nói ra chặng tiện trông vào chặng dang.  
 Nhưng e lại lụy đèn nàng,  
 đánh liều mới sẽ lựa đường hồi-tra.  
 Cùi đầu qui trước sân hoa,  
 thân-cung nàng mới thảo qua một tờ.  
 Diện-tiền trình với tiêu-thư,  
 thoát xem đường có ngắn-ngơ chút tình.  
 Liên tay trao lại Thúc-sinh,  
 rằng: "Tài nên trọng mà tình nên thương.  
 "Vi chằng có số giàu-sang,  
 "giá này dẫu đúc nhà vàng cũng nên.  
 "Bè trán chim nòi thuyền-quyên,  
 "hữu-tài thương nòi vô-duyên lạ đời!"  
 Sinh rằng: "Thật có như lời!  
 "Hồng-nhan bạc-mệnh một người nào vay!  
 "Nghìn xưa âu cùng thê này,  
 "tử-bi âu liệu bót tay mới vừa."  
 Tiêu-thư rằng: "Ý trong tờ,  
 "rắp đem mệnh bạc xin nhờ cửa không.  
 "Thôi thì thôi cũng chiểu lòng,  
 "cùng cho khói lụy trong vòng bước ra.  
 "Sân Quan-âm-các vườn ta,  
 "có cây trăm thước có hoa bốn mùa,  
 "có thảo-thụ có sơn-hồ.  
 "Cho nàng ra đó giữ chùa tụng kinh."  
 Tảng-tảng trời mới bình-minh,  
 hương-hoa ngũ-cung sắm-sanh lễ thường.  
 Dưa nàng đèn trước Phật-dường,  
 tam-quí ngũ-giới cho nàng xuất-gia.  
 Áo xanh đổi lầy cà-sa,  
 pháp-danh lại đổi tên ra Trạc Tuyền.  
 Sớm khuya tĩnh dù dấu-dèn,  
 Xuân Thu cắt sẵn hai tên hương-trà.  
 Nàng từ lánh gót vườn hoa,  
 đường gần rừng tía đường xa bụi hồng.  
 Nhân-duyên đâu lại còn mong?

1890

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1900

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1920

1925

"I sometimes sorrow for my lot in life."  
 The lady turned to Thúc, requesting him:  
 "Please grill the slave, pry loose the facts from her."

1890

He felt all torn and rent within his heart,  
 for he could not confess nor bear the scene.  
 Afraid he'd draw more outrage on her head,  
 he ventured, in soft tones, to question her.  
 Head bowed, the girl knelt down upon the floor  
 and of her past wrote out a brief account.

1895

Submitted to the lady, it was read—  
 it seemed to touch some chord inside her heart.  
 Forthwith she handed it to him and said:  
 "We should admire her gifts, deplore her woes.  
 Had fortune favored her with wealth and rank,  
 she could have graced a palace cast in gold.\*  
 A woman bobs upon the sea of life:  
 so blessed with talent, yet so cursed by fate!"

1900

"Indeed, you speak the utter truth," he said.  
 "Misfortune's never spared a single rose.  
 The rule has held since ages out of mind:  
 show mercy, treat her with a gentler hand."

1905

The lady said: "In her report she begged  
 to make her home within the Void's great gate.\*  
 Well, I'll be pleased to grant her that one wish  
 and help her break the cycle of her woes.  
 There in our garden is the Kuan-yin shrine,\*  
 with everblooming lotus, tall bo tree,\*  
 with many plants and flowers, rocks and pools:  
 let her go there to tend the shrine and pray."

1910

The dawn's first glow was glimmering in the skies—  
 they bore five offerings, incense, flowers, and such,  
 led Kiều to Buddha's temple: there she pledged  
 to live by all three vows and five commands.\*  
 For a cassock she doffed the slave's blue smock,  
 and as a nun she now was called Pure Spring.\*  
 She was to light the temple morn and eve,  
 while Spring and Autumn served as altar maids.

1920

So Kiều took refuge in the garden, near  
 the Purple Grove, far from the world's red dust.\*  
 What could she still expect of human ties?

1925

Khỏi diễu thận phẫn túi hổng thi thôi.  
 Phật-tiên thám lấp sầu vùi,  
 ngày pho thủ-tự đêm nỗi tâm-hương.  
 Cho hay giọt nước cành dương!  
 Lừa lòng tưới tắt mọi đường trần-duyên.  
 Nâu-sống từ trớ màu thiền,  
 sân thu trảng dà hai phen đứng dấu.  
 Quan-phòng then nhặt lười mau,  
 nói lời trước mặt rơi cháu vắng người.  
 Gác kinh viện sách đồi nời,  
 trong gang-tắc lại gấp mười quan-san.  
 Những là ngậm thở ngùi than,  
 tiêu-thư phái buổi vẫn-an về nhà.  
 Thùa cơ sinh mới lén ra,  
 xâm-xăm đèn mè vờn hoa với nàng.  
 Sụt-sùi giờ nỗi đoạn-trường,  
 giọt cháu tâm-tà đầm trảng áo xanh:  
 "Đà cam chịu bạc với tình,  
 chúa xuân để tội một mình cho hoa.  
 "Thập cơ thua tri đàn bà,  
 "trông vào da u ruột nói ra ngại lời.  
 "Vì ta cho lụy đèn người,  
 "cát-lâm ngọc trảng thiệt đời xuân xanh.  
 "Quán chi lén thác xuồng ghênh,  
 "cùng toan sông thác với tình cho xong.  
 "Tông-đường chút chưa cam lòng,  
 "cắn răng bé một chừ đồng làm hai.  
 "Thẹn minh đá nát vàng phai,  
 "trâm thân dẽ chuộc một lời được sao?"  
 Nàng rằng: "Chiếc bách sóng đào,  
 "nỗi chìm cung mặc lúc nào rủi may.  
 "Chút thân quần-quại vùng lầy,  
 "sông thừa còn tướng đèn rày nứa sao?  
 "Cùng liêu một giọt mưa đào,  
 "mà cho thiên-hạ trông vào cùng hay.  
 "Xót vì cầm đà bén dây,  
 "chẳng trăm năm cùng một ngày duyên ta.  
 "Liệu bài mở cửa cho ra,  
 "ấy là tình nặng ắt là ân sâu."

1930

1935

1940

1945

1950

1955

1960

1965

Now she was spared one shame—to sell her charms.  
 At Buddha's feet she buried griefs—by day  
 she'd copy texts, light incense up at night.  
 O magic drops from Kuan-yin's willow branch!\*  
 They quench lust's fire, wash earthly filth away.

1930

Since she put on a nun's drab brown attire,  
 the autumn moon had crossed the zenith twice.  
 Behind barred doors, inside a close-meshed net,  
 she talked in people's presence, wept unseen.

1935

Here stood the shrine and there his study lay:  
 though gate to gate, they were two worlds apart.  
 While he was sighing, moaning deep within,  
 one day his wife went visiting her folks.

1940

Chance beckoned—he slipped out and walked straight on  
 to reach the garden shrine and meet his love.  
 He cried his anguish bursting into sobs,  
 and teardrops soaked the flap of his blue gown:

1945

"I must admit I have betrayed our troth  
 and let you singly shoulder all our woes.\*  
 Outwitted by a woman, I've looked on,  
 heartsick and at a loss to tell the truth.

Through my own fault you've come to grief—pure jade  
 is mired in dirt, a life lost in its spring.  
 Oh, I would brave all perils and all risks  
 to stay with you, in death if not in life.

1950

But to my forebears I still owe an heir—  
 I'll clench my teeth and cut our bond in two.  
 I break my vow—could my next hundred lives\*  
 redeem the shame of one pledged word unkept?"\*

1955

She said: "A small, frail skiff that rides the waves\*  
 may float or sink as fortune will dictate.

1960

While I was floundering in the swamp of vice,  
 how could I ever hope to live till now?

It is my part to play a drop of rain\*  
 that falls at random as spectators watch.

1965

But lute and strings did come together once,  
 wedded for some scant days if not for life.  
 Please find me some safe exit from this cage:  
 you'll prove your love and earn my gratitude."

1965

Sinh rằng: "Riêng tường bấy lâu.  
"Lòng người nham-hiem biết đâu mà lường.  
"Nùa khi giông-tổ phù-phàng,  
"thiệt riêng đây cùng lại càng cực đây.  
"Liệu mà xa chạy cao bay.  
"Ái-ân ta có ngắn này mà thôi.  
"Bây giờ kẻ ngược người xuôi,  
"biết bao giờ lại nói lời nực-non.  
"Dẫu rằng sông cạn đá mòn,  
"con tâm đền thác cùng còn vương tờ."  
Cùng nhau kề-lề sau xưa,  
nói rồi lại nói lời chưa hết lời.  
Mặt trong tay chẳng nỡ rời,  
hoa-ti đã động tiếng người néo xa.  
Nhìn-ngừng nuốt túi đứng ra,  
tiêu-thư đâu dã rẽ hoa bước vào.  
Cười cười nói nói ngọt-ngào,  
hỏi: "Chàng mới ở chốn nào lại chơi?"  
Đồi quanh sinh mới liệu lời:  
"Tim hoa quá bước xem người việt kinh."  
Khen rằng: "Bút-pháp dã tinh!  
"So vào với thiếp Lan-dinh nào thua.  
"Tiếc thay lưu-lạc giang-hồ,  
"nghìn vàng thật cùng nên mua lầy tài."  
Thiền-trà cạn chén hồng-mai,  
thong-dong nỗi gót thư-trai cùng về.  
Nàng căng e-lệ ú-ê,  
ri tai hối lại hoa-ti trước sau.  
Hoa rằng: "Bà đền dã lâu,  
"ròn chân đứng nép độ đâu nứa giờ.  
"Rành-rành kè tóc chân tờ,  
"mấy lời nghe hết dã dư tú-tường,  
"bao nhiêu đoạn khổ tình thương,  
"nỗi ông vật-và nỗi nàng thở-than.  
"Ngán tôi đứng lại một bên,  
"chán tai rồi mới bước lên trên lầu."  
Nghe thôi kinh-hãi xiết dâu:  
"Đán bà thè ấy thấy âu một người!  
"Ay mới gan ấy mới tài!  
"Nghi căng thêm nỗi sờn gai rụng-rời.

1970

1975

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2005

"I've nursed that thought in secret," he replied.  
"How can one gauge a human heart's abyss?  
I fear that, if and when a storm breaks out,  
it will wreak harm on you and grief on me.  
Try for your freedom—run or fly away!\*"  
Our love has had its time—this is the end.  
We two shall soon be traveling opposite paths:  
when might we meet and pledge our troth anew?  
Rocks crumble, streams run dry—a silkworm, dead,  
still clings on to the strand of silk it's spun."\*

1970

1975

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2005

The past, the future both discussed at length—  
they talked and talked, undrained of tender words.  
Eyes locked, hands clasped, the lovers would not part,  
but from afar a housemaid flashed a cue.  
He swallowed down his shame and made to leave—  
in stalked the lady brushing flowers aside.

All honey and all smiles, she greeted him  
and asked: "So, have you come here for a walk?"  
He groped for some excuse: "While gathering flowers,  
I stopped to watch her copy sacred texts."  
"Such exquisite brush strokes!" she cried in praise.  
"*Lan-t'ing* engravings hardly excel them!"  
Alas, by life's strong tides she's tossed about,  
a talent worth pure gold—a thousand coins!"  
Both drank a Dhyana brew, red plum-wood tea;\*  
then, strolling, they regained their book-lined room.

Kiều's gloom and dread increased—under her breath,  
she asked the housemaid what had taken place.  
The housemaid said: "She was here all the while—  
she stood on tiptoe spying half an hour.  
She saw it all, missed not one bit or shred,  
heard every word, and learned the full, whole truth:  
all your sore trials, all your dire ordeals,  
the master's fits of grief, your own laments.  
She bade me wait there standing to one side—  
she got her earful, then she went upstairs."

Kiều heard and felt cold terror in her soul:  
"I'll never look upon her like again.  
That was true self-command, that was pure sham.  
The merest thought of her will make flesh creep.

"Người đâu sâu-sắc nước dời, "mà chàng Thúc phải ra người bó tay. "Thực-tang bắt được đường này, "máu ghen ai cũng chau mày nghiền răng. "Thè mà im chảng dài-dàng, "chào-mời vui-vé nói-nắng dịu-dàng. "Giận dẫu ra dạ thề thường, "cười này mới thật khôn lường hiềm-sâu. "Thân ta ta phải lo-âu, "miệng hùm nọc rắn ở đâu chồn này. "Vì chẳng chấp cánh cao bay, "rào cây lâu cung có ngày bê hoa. "Phận bèo bao quán nước sa, "lên-dênh đâu nữa cũng là lên-dênh. "Chín e quê khách một mình, "tay không chưa dẽ kiềm vành ầm-no." Nghì đi nghỉ lại quanh-co, Phật-tiên sẵn có mọi đồ kim-ngân. Bên minh giắt đế hộ thân, lần nghe canh đã một phần trống ba. Cất minh qua ngọn tường hoa, lần đường theo bóng trăng tà về tây.	2010 2015 2020 2025
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V

Mịt-mù dặm cát đồi cây, tiềng gà diêm nguyệt dâu giày cầu sương. Canh khuya thân gái dặm trường, phản e đường-sá phản thương dài-dầu. Trời đông vừa rạng ngàn dâu, bơ-vơ nào đã biết đâu là nhà. Chùa dâu trông thấy néo xa, ranh-ranh Chiêu Ân Am ba chữ bài. Xẩm-xẩm gò mé cửa ngoài, tru-tri nghe tiềng rước-mời vào trong. Thầy màu áo-mặc nau-sống, Giác Duyên sư-trưởng lành lòng liên thương. Gạn-gุง ngành ngọn cho tường, lạ-lùng nàng hãy tim đường nói quanh: "Tiêu-thiền quê ở Bắc-kinh,	2030 2035
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Where else to find a woman of such depths? No wonder Thúc now lies bound hand and foot. When she caught us together, any wife would in a jealous rage have scowled and snarled. But no, she made no trouble, kept her calm— she greeted with good cheer, she sweetly talked. An angry face reveals what stirs the heart, but deep and mean are those who hate and smile. My life I must take into my own hands, beware a tiger's jaws, a serpent's fangs. Unless I grow my wings and fly, some day she'll nip the blossom off the tree she's hedged. A floating fern minds not the swift, strong stream— destined to drift, it drifts no matter where. But how, alone and lost on strangers' soil, shall I fight cold and hunger with bare hands?"	2010 2015 2020 2025
Thoughts scurried back and forth—and then she saw some altar objects, gold or silver things: she grabbed a few, hid them inside her dress. As she heard drumbeats sound the night's third watch, she heaved herself and climbed across the wall, then westward picked her way in moonset dusk.	2030

V

Through wooded hills, sand trails immersed in mist; cockcrow from moon-lit huts; fresh marks of shoes on dew-soaked bridge. Along the path, at night, a girl braved wind and weather walking on. The eastern sky glowed up, lit mulberry groves— forlorn, Kiều knew not where to find a home. Then, in the distance, loomed a Buddhist church— she read the sign: "Retreat of Blessed Peace."* She made straight for the entrance gate and knocked— a nun heard her, came out, and let her in. On seeing Kiều in plain monastic garb, Giác Duyên, kind-hearted prioress, liked the girl.* She asked about her past from root to top— yet feeling strange, Kiều skirted round the truth: "This humble nun's a native of Peking	2030 2035 2040
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"qui sư qui Phật tu-hành bầy lâu.  
 "Bán-sư rồi cùng đèn sau,  
 "dạy đưa pháp-báo sang hẫu sư-huynh."  
 Rày vầng điện-hiền rành-rành,  
 chuông vàng khánh bạc bên minh giờ ra.  
 Xem qua sư mới dạy qua:  
 "Phái ni Hằng Thúy là ta hậu-tình.  
 "Chín e đường-sá một mình,  
 "ở đây chờ-dợi sư-huynh ít ngày."  
 Gửi thân được chôn am mây,  
 muỗi-dưa đắp-đồi tháng ngày thong-dong.  
 Kệ-kinh câu cũ thuộc lòng,  
 hương-dèn việc trước trai-phòng quen tay.  
 Sớm khuya lá bối phướn mây,  
 ngọn đèn khêu nguyệt tiếng chày nện sương.  
 Thầy nàng thông-tuệ khác thường,  
 sư càng nề mặt nàng càng vững chân.  
  
 Cửa thiền vừa cù cuối xuân,  
 bóng hoa rợp dật vé ngân ngang trời.  
 Gió quang mây tạnh thánh-thời,  
 có người đàn-việt lên chơi cửa già.  
 Giờ đồ chuông khánh xem qua,  
 khen rằng: "Khéo giống của nhà Hoạn-nương!"  
 Giác Duyên thất ý lo-lường,  
 đêm thanh mới hối lại nàng trước sau.  
 Nghì rằng khôn nỗi giấu máu,  
 sự mình nàng mới gót dấu bảy ngay:  
 "Bây giờ sự đã đường này,  
 "phận hèn dấu rủi dấu may tại người."  
 Giác Duyên nghe nói rụng-rời,  
 nứa thương nứa sợ bối-hối chẳng xong.  
 Rí tai mới kê sự lòng:  
 "Ở đây cửa Phật là không hép gì.  
 "E chàng những sự bất-ký,  
 "dè nàng cho đèn thè thì cũng thương.  
 "Lánh xa trước liệu tìm đường,  
 "ngồi chờ nước đèn nên đường còn quê."  
 Có nhà họ Bạc bên kia,  
 am mây quen lối đi về dấu-hương.

2045

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2080

who's lived by Buddha's teaching for some time.

Later, my prioress in her turn will come,

2045

but she told me to bring you these two gifts."

She took them out and showed a golden bell,

a silver gong she'd hidden on herself.

The prioress cast an absent glance and said:

"So you've come from Hằng Thúy, my good old friend?

2050

It worries me to see you trek alone—

stay here a day or two till she arrives."

Kiều made a home of that small cloud-locked church,  
 living on salt and greens in carefree days.

She'd chant old sutras she had learned by heart,

2055

tend incense burners, tidy rooms and cells,

handle palm leaves, fly banners in the clouds,

light lamps at moonrise, ring the bell at dawn.

The prioress found her mind above the norm—

2060

highly regarded, Kiều felt more secure.

Now spring was ending—flowers cast their shades  
 on earth, the Silver River crossed the sky.

No wind, no cloud, a time of leisured ease—

a pilgrim came to worship at the shrine.

Admiring both the gong and bell, she said:

2065

"But they look like the property of Miss Hoạn!"

Giác Duyên was truly worried by those words—  
 in the still night, she queried Kiều again.

Kiều could no longer keep her secret dark:

2070

from top to bottom she retold her past.

She added: "Now that things have come this far,  
 my weal or woe lies solely in your hands."

When she had heard Kiều's tale, the nun grew faint,  
 teetering between plain pity and dire dread.

She whispered in Kiều's ear and spoke her heart:

2075

"The Buddha's gate is open wide to all.

But things I can't foresee are what I dread.

I'd sorely grieve if something struck you here.

Plan far ahead and flee—you'd be unwise

2080

to sit and wait till waters reach your feet."

Some people surnamed Bạc lived nearby there,\*  
 and used to bring an offering for the shrine.

Nhắn sang dặn hêt mọi đường,  
đón nhà hảy tạm cho nàng trú chán.  
Những mùng được chôn an thân,  
vội-vàng nǎo kịp tính gân tính xa.  
Nào ngờ cung tồ bợm già,  
Bạc-bà học với Tú-bà đồng-môn!  
Thầy nàng lạt phẩn tươi son,  
mừng thầm được món bán-buôn có lời.  
Hư-không đặt-dề nêu lời,  
nàng đã nhớ-nhác rung-rời lâm phen.  
Mụ càng xua-đuôi cho liền,  
lầy lời hung-hiem ép duyên Châu-Trấn.  
Rằng: "Nàng muôn đậm một thân,  
"lại mang lầy tiếng dữ gân lành xa.  
"Khéo oan-gia của phả-gia,  
"còn ai dám chứa vào nhà nứa dây.  
"Kíp toan kiêm chôn xe dày,  
"không-dưng chưa dẽ mà bay dường trời!  
"Nơi gần thi chẳng tiện nơi,  
"nơi xa thi chẳng có người nào xa.  
"Này chàng Bạc Hạnh cháu nhà,  
"cùng trong thân-thích ruột-rà chàng ai.  
"Cửa hàng buôn-bán châu Thai,  
"thật-thả có một đơn-sai chàng hẽ.  
"Thề nǎo nàng cùng phái nghe.  
"Thành-thân rồi sẽ liệu về châu Thai.  
"Bây giờ ai lại biết ai?  
"Dẫu lòng bẽ rộng sông dài thênh-thênh.  
"Nàng dấu quyết chàng thuận tình,  
"trái lời néo trước lụy minh đền sau."  
Nàng càng mặt ú mày chau,  
càng nghe mụ nói càng đau như đán.  
Nghĩ minh túng dắt sẩy chân,  
thề cùng nàng mới xa gần thô-than:  
"Thiếp như con én lạc đản,  
phái cung ráy đá sọt lán cây cong.  
"Cùng dường dẫu tính chữ tòng,  
biết người biết mặt biết lòng làm sao?  
"Nứa khi muôn một thề nǎo,  
"bán hùm buôn sói chắc vào lưng đâu?

2085

2090

2095

2100

2105

2110

2115

2120

They were sent for, advised of all the facts,  
and asked to shelter Kiều beneath their roof.

2085

Too glad to find a haven, Kiều rushed in—  
how could she stop to reckon distant risks,  
suspect another lurking nest of thieves?  
Dame Bạc soon proved a colleague of Dame Tú.

She crowded within at Kiều's unpainted charms:  
she'd gotten what should yield a fat return.

2090

Out of thin air she would concoct her tales  
and hold the girl on tenterhooks of fear.  
Repeating she would turn her out of doors,  
she hurled dark threats to force a man on her:\*

2095

"Ten thousand miles from home you're all alone,  
and all around you've spread a nasty name.\*  
You cursed breed, you will yet wreck our home—  
who else but us would dare to harbor you?  
Grab the first chance you have and tie the knot,  
or fly and hide in heaven if you can.

2100

Well, in these parts no match can be arranged,  
nor is there any prospect farther off.  
But there's Bạc Hạnh, a nephew dear to me,\*  
my blood relation, not just any man.

2105

He owns and runs a trading shop in T'ai:\*

there's none as honest—never breaks his word.  
Listen to me and marry him—you must.  
Once wedded, you can move with him to T'ai.  
Who'll recognize you there? At large and free,  
you'll rove the streams and seas just as you wish.  
If you refuse to give me your consent,  
you'll go against my wish and come to grief."

2110

Care knit Kiều's brows, gloom overcast her face—  
the more she heard, the more it hurt like blows.

2115

She'd stumbled, falling where she could not flee—  
at bay, the quarry vented her despair:

"I'm just a swallow strayed far from its flock—  
once wounded by a bow, it fears curved boughs.  
If, cornered, I must wed and serve a man,\*  
how do I know him, know his face, his heart?  
Should later it turn out that I have bought  
a tiger in a poke, where shall I turn?\*

2120

"anh-hùng đoán giữa trán-ai mới già!  
"Một lời đã biết đền ta,  
"muôn chung nghìn tú cùng là có nhau."  
Hai bên ý hợp tâm đầu,  
khi thân chẳng lọ là cầu mới thân.  
Ngó lời nói với bǎng-nhân,  
tiễn trảm lại cù nguyễn-ngân phát-hoàn.  
Buồng riêng súra chôn thanh-nhàn,  
đặt giường thắt-báo vây màn bát-tiên.  
Trai anh-hùng gái thuyền-quyên,  
phi nguyễn sánh phượng đẹp duyên cõi rồng.  
Nứa nám hương-lứa đang nồng,  
trương-phu thoát dã động lòng bồn phuong.  
Trông vời trời bê mênh-mang,  
thanh gươm yên ngura lên đường thẳng gióng.  
Nàng rắng: "Phận gái chừ tòng,  
"chàng đi thiếp cùng một lòng xin đi."  
Tử rắng: "Tâm phúc tương tri,  
"sao chưa thoát khỏi nù-nhi thường-tình?  
"Bao giờ mười vạn tinh-binh,  
"tiếng bê dây đất bóng tinh rợp đường,  
"lâm cho rõ mặt phi-thường,  
"bấy giờ ta sè rước nàng nghi-gia.  
"Bảng nay bồn bê không nhà,  
"theo cảng thêm bạn biệt là đi đâu.  
"Đành lòng chờ đó ít lâu,  
"chầy chằng là một năm sau vội gì."  
Quyết lời dứt áo ra đi,  
gió đưa bằng tiện đã lia dặm khơi.  
Nàng từ chiếc bóng song mai,  
đêm thâu dâng-dâng nhặt cài then mây.  
Sân rêu chằng vè dẫu giày,  
cò cao hơn thước liễu gãy vài phân.  
Doái trông muôn dặm từ-phản,  
hỗn quê theo ngọn mây Tân xa-xa.  
Xót thay huyền cõi xuân già,  
tâm lòng thương-nhớ biết là có nguôi?  
Chắc đã mười mây năm trời,  
còn ra khi đã da mồi tóc sương.  
Tiếc thay chút nghĩa cù-càng,

2205

2210

2215

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2225

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2240

can see the hero hid in common dust!  
Your words prove you discern me from the rest—  
we'll sit together when I sit on high." \*

Two minds at one, two hearts in unison—  
unbidden, love will seek those meant for love.

2205

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a sumptuous bed and curtains decked with gods.\*  
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2210

A year half gone—their love was burning bright,  
but now he heard the call of all four winds.  
He gazed afar on sea and heaven, then  
he leapt into the saddle with his sword.

2215

"A woman's place is near her man," she said.\*  
"If go you must, I beg to go with you."  
"We read each other's hearts, don't we?" Tử said.  
"Yet you act like some vulgar woman—why?  
When I can lead a hundred thousand men,  
when drumbeats shake the earth and banners throw  
thick shadows on the road, when all the world  
admires this hero, then I'll take you home.  
There's nowhere I belong. If you're to come,  
you'll hinder me—I know not where I'll go.  
Have patience—just wait here for me a while:  
I shall be back no later than a year."

2220

This said, he tore himself away and left—  
wind-winged, the eagle soared to hunt the skies.\*

2225

Alone beside the window where grew plums,  
she passed long nights within fast-bolted doors.  
The courtyard moss bore no more marks of shoes—  
the weeds ran wild, but gaunt the willow grew.  
She peered through space to glimpse the elms back home\*  
and, riding clouds, her fancy would fly there.\*  
For her old parents how it ached, her heart!\*

Had time allayed their sorrow at their loss?  
With more than ten years gone, if still alive,  
they must have skin with scales and hair like frost.  
Oh, how she pined and mourned for her old love—

2235

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dẫu lia ngó ý còn vương tơ lòng.

Duyên em dẫu nỗi chí hồng,  
may ra khi đà tay bồng tay mang.

Tắc lòng cõi-quốc tha-hương,  
đường kia nỗi nọ ngồn-ngang bời-bời.

Cánh hồng bay bồng tuyệt vời,  
đà mòn con mắt phương trời đậm-dẩm.

Đêm ngày luồng những âm-thầm,  
lửa binh đâu đậm-đậm một phương.

Ngắt trời sát-khi mơ-máng,  
đẩy sông kinh-ngạc chật đường giáp-binh.

Người quen-thuộc kẻ chung-quanh,  
nhù nảng hảy tạm lành mình một nơi.

Nắng rắng: "Trước đà hẹn lời,  
"dẫu trong nguy-hiểm dám rời trước xưa."

Còn dang dùng-dắng ngắn-ngơ,  
mè ngoái đà thay bồng cờ tiếng la.

Giáp-binh kéo đèn quanh nhà,  
đồng-thanh cùng grito: "Nào là phu-nhân?"

Hai bên mười vị tướng-quân,  
đặt gươm cõi giáp trước sân khâu-dầu.

Cung-nga thề-nữ nỗi sau,  
rắng: "Vâng lệnh-chí rước cháu vu-quí."

Sẵn-sàng phượng-liễn loan-nghi,  
hoa-quan chấp-chói hả-y rõ-ràng.

Dụng cờ nỗi trống lên đường,  
trúc-tơ nỗi trước đảo-vàng kéo sau.

Hóa-bài tiến-lộ ruồi mau,  
Nam-định nghe động trống cháu đại-doanh.

Kéo cờ lùy phát súng thành,  
Tù-công ra ngựa thân-nghênh cửa ngoài.

Rờ minh lụt vé cân-dai,  
hảy côn hâm ên mà ngái như xưa.

Cười rắng: "Cá nước duyên ưa!  
"Nhớ lời nói những bao giờ hay không?

"Anh-hùng mới biết anh-hùng,  
"rày xem phòng đà cam lòng ấy chưa?"

Nắng rắng: "Chút phận ngày-thơ,  
cùng may dây cát được nhờ bóng cây.

"Đền bây giờ mới thấy dây,

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cut from her mind, it clung on to her heart.\*

If her young sister had retied the knot,  
she must be cuddling children in both arms.  
An exile's yearning thoughts of her far land  
entwined and interwove with other cares.

2245

After the eagle vanished into space,\*  
she kept her eyes fast set on heaven's edge.  
In silence she was waiting, night and day,  
when through the region roared the flames of war.  
Gray phantoms, fumes of slaughter leapt the skies  
as sharks roved streams and armored men prowled roads.  
Her friends and neighbors all exhorted her  
to flee and somewhere stay out of harm's reach.  
But she replied: "I once gave him my word—  
though danger threatens, I shall not break faith."

2250

Perplexed, she was still wavering when, outside,  
she now saw flags and heard the clang of gongs.  
Armor-clad troops had come and ringed the house—  
in chorus they all asked, "Where is our queen?"  
Ten officers, in two rows, laid down their arms,  
took off their coats, and kowtowed on the ground.  
Ladies-in-waiting followed, telling her:  
"By order we'll escort you to our lord."

2260

The phoenix-coach held ready for a queen  
her glittering diadem, her sparkling robe.  
They hoisted flags, beat drums, and off they marched—  
musicians led the way, maids closed the rear.  
A herald rushed ahead—the Southern Court  
called all to its headquarters with the drum.

2265

On ramparts banners waved and cannons boomed—  
Lord Tù rode out to meet her at the gate.  
Turbaned and sashed, he looked unlike himself,  
but he still had the hero's face of old.

2270

He laughed and said: "When fish and water meet,  
it's love! Remember what you told me once?  
To spot a hero took a heroine—  
well, now, have I fulfilled your fondest hopes?"  
She said: "I'm just a humble clinging vine  
that by good luck may flourish in your shade.  
It's only now we see it all come true,"

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"anh-hùng đoán giữa trán-ai mới già!  
"Một lời đã biết đèn ta,  
"muôn chung nghìn tú cùng là có nhau."  
Hai bên ý hợp tâm đầu,  
khi thân chẳng lọ là cầu mới thân.  
Ngó lời nói với bǎng-nhân,  
tiễn trảm lại cù nguyên-ngân phát-hoàn.  
Buồng riêng súra chồn thanh-nhàn,  
đặt giường thắt-báo vây màn bát-tiên.  
Trai anh-hùng gái thuyền-quyên,  
phi nguyên sánh phượng đẹp duyên cõi rồng.  
Nứa nǎm hương-lúa đang nồng,  
trương-phu thoát đã động lòng bôn phuong.  
Trõng với trời bék mènh-mang,  
thanh gurom yên ngựa lên đường thẳng gióng.  
Nàng rằng: "Phận gái chừ tòng,  
"chàng đi thiếp cùng một lòng xin đi."  
Tử rằng: "Tâm phúc tương tri,  
"sao chưa thoát khỏi nử-nhi thường-tinh?  
"Bao giờ mười vạn tinh-binhh,  
"tiếng bẽ dậy dắt bóng tinh rợp đường,  
"làm cho rõ mặt phi-thường,  
"bấy giờ ta sẽ rước nàng nghi-gia.  
"Bảng nay bôn bék không nhà,  
"theo cảng thêm bạn biết là đi đâu.  
"Đành lòng chờ đó ít lâu,  
"chầy chàng là một nǎm sau vội gì."  
Quyết lời dứt áo ra đi,  
gió đưa bắng tiễn đã lia đậm khơi.  
Nàng từ chiếc bóng song mai,  
dêm thâu đằng-dẳng nhặt cài then mây.  
Sân rêu chằng vè dầu giày,  
có cao hơn thước liễu gãy vài phân.  
Doái trông muôn đậm tú-phấn,  
hỗn quê theo ngọn mây Tần xa-xa.  
Xót thay huyền cõi xuân già,  
tâm lòng thương-nhớ biết là có nguôi?  
Choc đã mười mây nám trời,  
còn ra khi đã da mổi tóc sương.  
Tiếc thay chút nghĩa cù-càng,

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can see the hero hid in common dust!  
Your words prove you discern me from the rest—  
we'll sit together when I sit on high."\*  
Two minds at one, two hearts in unison—  
unbidden, love will seek those meant for love.

2205

Now he approached a go-between—through her  
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It's only now we see it all come true,"

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"Dẽ-dàng là thói hống-nhan,  
"càng cay-nghiệt lầm càng oan-trái nhiều."  
Hoạn-thư hồn lạc phách xiêu,  
khẩu-dầu dưới trướng liệu điêu kêu-ca.  
Rắng: "Tôi chút dạ dàn bà,  
"ghen-tuông thi cùng người ta thường-tinh.  
"Nghỉ cho khi gác viêt kinh,  
"với khi khói cửa dứt tình chẳng theo.  
"Lòng riêng riêng những kính-yêu,  
"chỗng chung chưa dẽ ai chiếu cho ai.  
"Trót lòng gây việc chồng-gai,  
"còn nhở lương bể thương bài nào chẳng."  
Khen cho: "Thật dâ nên rắng  
"khôn-ngoan dẽn mực nói-năng phải lời.  
"Tha ra thi cùng may đời,  
"làm ra thi cùng ra người nhô-nhen.  
"Đã lòng tri-quá thi nên."  
Truyền quân-lệnh xuống trướng-tiền tha ngay.  
Tạ lòng lạy trước sân mây.  
Cứa viên lại dắt một dây dẫn vào.  
Nàng rắng: "Lồng-lồng trời cao!  
"Hại nhân nhân hại sự nào tại ta."  
Trước là Bạc Hạnh Bạc-bà,  
bên là Ưng Khuyển bên là Sớ Khanh,  
Tú-bà với Mã Giám-sinh,  
các tên tội ấy đáng tinh còn sao?  
Lệnh quân truyền xuống nội-dao,  
thể sao thi lại cứ sao gia-hình.  
Máu rơi thịt nát tan-tành,  
ai ai trông thấy hồn kinh phách rời.  
Cho hay muôn sự tại trời,  
phụ người chẳng bò khi người phụ ta.  
Mày người bac-ác tinh-ma,  
minh làm minh chịu kêu mà ai thương.  
Ba quân đồng mặt pháp-trường,  
thanh thiên bạch nhật rò-ràng cho coi.  
Việc nàng báo-phục vừa rồi,  
Giác Duyên vội dà gửi lời từ-quí.  
Nàng rắng: "Thiên tái nhất thi!  
"Cõ-nhân dà dẽ mây khi bàn-hoàn.

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A woman, though, should wield a gentle hand—  
more cruelties she sows, more woes she reaps."

The lady's wits and spirits all took flight—  
under the tent she bowed her head and cried:

"I have a woman's mind, a petty soul,  
and jealousy's a trait all humans share.  
But please recall I let you tend the shrine,  
and when you fled I stopped pursuing you.  
I felt esteem for you in my own heart—  
what woman, though, would gladly share her man?  
I'm sorry I strewed thorns along your path—  
may I beseech your mercy on my fate?"

In praise Kiều cried: "To tell the truth, you boast  
a matchless wit, you know just what to say.  
You have your luck to thank that I'll spare you,  
for if I strike I'll look a small, mean soul.  
You show a contrite spirit, as you should."  
She gave an order setting free Miss Hoạn,  
who gratefully fell prostrate on the ground.\*  
Now a long string of captives crossed the gate.

Kiêu said: "High Heaven towers over all!  
It's not my law that ill be paid with ill."  
Before their judge, Bạc Hạnh, Dame Bạc came first,  
then Hawk and Hound, these followed by Sớ Khanh,  
and last, not least, Dame Tú and Scholar Mã—  
guilty as charged, how could they go scot-free?  
The executioner now received the word:  
mete out such pains as fit each broken oath.  
Blood flowed in streams while flesh was hacked to bits—  
the scene struck terror into every soul.

With Heaven rest all matters here below:  
harm people and they'll harm you in their turn.  
Perfidious humans who do fiendish deeds  
shall suffer, crying quarter all in vain.  
All soldiers, crowded on the grounds, could watch  
the scourge divine deal justice in broad day.

When Kiều had paid due wages to them all,  
Giác Duyên soon begged to take her leave—Kiều said:  
"Once in a thousand years! Is that the most  
the best of friends may ever hope to meet?

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"Rối dây bèo hợp mây tan,  
biết đâu hạc nội mây ngàn là đâu."

Sư rằng: "Cùng chặng mây lâu,  
trong năm năm lại gặp nhau đó mà.

"Nhớ ngày hành-cú-cốc phương xa,  
gặp sư Tam Hợp vốn là tiên-tri.

"Báo cho hội ngộ chí kỵ,  
năm nay là một nữa thi năm năm.

"Mới hay tiên-dịnh chặng lâm,  
đã tin điêu trước át nhảm việc sau.

"Còn nhiều ân-ái với nhau,  
cơ duyên nào đã hết đâu vội gì."

Nàng rằng: "Tiên-dịnh tiên-tri,  
lời sư đã dạy át thi chặng sai.

"Họa bao giờ có gặp người,  
vì tôi cậy hỏi một lời chung-thân."

Giác Duyên vang dận ân-cắn,  
tạ-tử thoát đã dời chân cõi ngoài.

Nàng từ ân oán rạch-rời,  
bè oan đường đã vời-voi cạnh lòng.

Tạ ân lạy trước Tử-công:  
"Chút thân bỗ-liếu nào mong có rày.

"Trộm nhớ sầm-sét ra tay,  
tắc riêng như cắt gánh dây đỗ di.

"Chạm xương chép dạ xiết chi,  
dẽ dem gan-óc đền nghi trời-mây."

Tử rằng: "Quốc-sĩ xưa nay,  
chọn người tri-ký một ngày được chàng?

"Anh-hùng tiếng dâ gọi rằng,  
giữa đường dẫu thây bất-bằng mà tha.

"Huống chi việc cùng việc nhà!  
Lộ lá thâm-tạ mới là tri-ân?

"Xót nàng còn chút song-thân,  
bấy nay kê Việt người Tấn cách xa.

"Sao cho muôn dặm một nhà,  
cho người thây mặt là ta cam lòng."

Vội truyền sứa tiệc quân-trung,  
muôn binh nghìn tướng hội-đồng tẩy-oan.

Thùa cơ trúc ché ngôi tan,  
binh-uy từ ấy sầm ran trong ngoái.

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Two wanderers will part ways—where shall I find\*  
the crane, the cloud that roams the wilds and heights?"

"But it will not be long," the nun replied.

"Our paths will cross again within five years.

As I remember, on my pilgrim's way,  
I chanced upon a prophetess, Tam Hợp.\*  
She forecast you and I would meet this year,  
then yet another time five twelvemonths hence.  
Indeed, her prophecy's not missed the mark:  
once proven true, it shall prove true again.  
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Besides, it was a family matter, too!  
Need you bow low and offer me your thanks?  
But you still have your parents—I regret  
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May you rejoin them both beneath one roof  
and see their faces—then, I'll rest at ease."  
At his command, all gathered, spread the boards  
to celebrate the just redress of wrongs.

Bamboos split fast; tiles slip, soon fall apart:\*

his martial might now thundered far and wide.

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"Dẽ-dàng là thói hổng-nhan,  
"càng cay-nghiệt lầm càng oan-trái nhiều."  
Hoạn-thư hồn lạc phách xiêu,  
khẩu-dầu dưới trướng liệu điêu kêu-ca.  
Rắng: "Tôi chút dạ dàn bà,  
"ghen-tuông thì cùng người ta thường-tình.  
"Nghi cho khi gác việt kinh,  
"với khi khói cửa dứt tình chẳng theo.  
"Lòng riêng riêng những kính-yêu,  
"chỗng chung chura dẽ ai chiếu cho ai.  
"Trót lòng gây việc chông-gai,  
"còn nhở lương bê thương bài nào chẳng."  
Khen cho: "Thật dã nên rằng  
"khôn-ngoan đên mực nói-nắng phái lời.  
"Tha ra thi cùng may dời,  
"làm ra thi cùng ra người nhó-nhen.  
"Đã lòng tri-quá thì nên."  
Truyện quân-lệnh xuồng trướng-tiễn tha ngay.  
Tạ lòng lạy trước sân mây.  
Cứa viên lại đất một dây dẫn vào.  
Nàng rằng: "Lồng-lồng trời cao!  
"Hại nhân nhân hai sự nào tại ta."  
Trước là Bạc Hạnh Bạc-bà,  
bên là Ưng Khuyển bên là Sở Khanh.  
Tú-bà với Mã Giám-sinh,  
các tên tội ấy đáng tình còn sao?  
Lệnh quân truyền xuồng nội-đao,  
thể sao thi lại cứ sao gia-hình.  
Máu rơi thịt nát tan-tành,  
ai ai trông thấy hồn kinh phách rời.  
Cho hay muôn sự tại trời,  
phụ người chẳng bờ khi người phụ ta.  
Mấy người bạc-ác tinh-ma,  
minh làm minh chịu kêu mà ai thương.  
Ba quân đồng mặt pháp-trường,  
thanh thiên bạch nhật rò-ràng cho coi.  
Việc nàng báo-phục vừa rồi,  
Giác Duyên vội dã gửi lời từ-quí.  
Nàng rằng: "Thiên tài nhất thi!  
"Cõ-nhân dã dẽ mấy khi bàn-hoàn.

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A woman, though, should wield a gentle hand—  
more cruelties she sows, more woes she reaps."

The lady's wits and spirits all took flight—  
under the tent she bowed her head and cried:

"I have a woman's mind, a petty soul,  
and jealousy's a trait all humans share.  
But please recall I let you tend the shrine,  
and when you fled I stopped pursuing you.  
I felt esteem for you in my own heart—  
what woman, though, would gladly share her man?  
I'm sorry I strewed thorns along your path—  
may I beseech your mercy on my fate?"

In praise Kiều cried: "To tell the truth, you boast  
a matchless wit, you know just what to say.  
You have your luck to thank that I'll spare you,  
for if I strike I'll look a small, mean soul.  
You show a contrite spirit, as you should."  
She gave an order setting free Miss Hoạn,  
who gratefully fell prostrate on the ground.\*  
Now a long string of captives crossed the gate.

Kiêu said: "High Heaven towers over all!  
It's not my law that ill be paid with ill."  
Before their judge, Bạc Hạnh, Dame Bạc came first,  
then Hawk and Hound, these followed by Sở Khanh,  
and last, not least, Dame Tú and Scholar Mã—  
guilty as charged, how could they go scot-free?  
The executioner now received the word:  
mete out such pains as fit each broken oath.  
Blood flowed in streams while flesh was hacked to bits—  
the scene struck terror into every soul.

With Heaven rest all matters here below:  
harm people and they'll harm you in their turn.  
Perfidious humans who do fiendish deeds  
shall suffer, crying quarter all in vain.  
All soldiers, crowded on the grounds, could watch  
the scourge divine deal justice in broad day.

When Kiều had paid due wages to them all,  
Giác Duyên soon begged to take her leave—Kiều said:  
"Once in a thousand years! Is that the most  
the best of friends may ever hope to meet?

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"Rồi dây bèo hợp mây tan,  
"biết đâu hạc nội mây ngàn là đâu."

Sư rằng: "Cùng chặng mây lâu,  
"trong năm nǎm lại gặp nhau đó mà.  
"Nhờ ngày hành-cúrc phuong xa,  
"gặp sư Tam Hợp vốn là tiên-tri.  
"Báo cho hội ngộ chí kỳ,  
"nǎm nay là một nǔa thi nǎm nǎm.  
"Mới hay tiễn-dịnh chặng lầm,  
"dã tin diêu truóc át nhảm việc sau.  
"Còn nhiều ân-ái với nhau,  
"cơ duyên nào dã hết đâu vội gì."

Nàng rằng: "Tiễn-dịnh tiên-tri,  
"lời sư dã dạy át thi chặng sai.  
"Họa bao giờ có gặp người,  
"vì tôi cậy hói một lời chung-thân."

Giác Duyên vắng dặn ân-cắn,  
tạ-từ thoát dã dời chân cỏi ngoái.  
Nàng từ ân oán rạch-rời,  
bề oan đường dã voi-voi cạnh lòng.  
Ta ân lạy trước Tứ-công:  
"Chút thân bõ-liễu nào mong có rày.  
"Trộm nhở sầm-sét ra tay,  
tắc riêng như cắt gánh đầy đố di.  
"Chạm xương chép da xiết chi,  
dẽ dem gan-óc dến nghi trời-mây."

Tứ rằng: "Quốc-si xưa nay,  
chọn người tri-ký một ngày được chàng?  
"Anh-hùng tiếng dã gọi rằng,  
giữa đường dẫu thây băt-băng mà tha.  
"Huống chi việc cùng việc nhà!  
Lợ là thảm-tạ mới là tri-ân?  
"Xót nàng còn chút song-thân,  
bấy nay kè Việt người Tần cách xa.  
"Sao cho muôn đậm một nhà,  
cho người thây mặt là ta cam lòng."  
Vội truyền sứa tiệc quân-trung,  
muôn binh nghìn tướng hội-đồng tẩy-oan.  
Thứa cơ trúc ché ngôi tan,  
binh-uy từ ấy sầm ran trong ngoái.

Two wanderers will part ways—where shall I find\*  
the crane, the cloud that roams the wilds and heights?"  
"But it will not be long," the nun replied.  
"Our paths will cross again within five years.  
As I remember, on my pilgrim's way,  
I chanced upon a prophetess, Tam Hợp.\*  
She forecast you and I would meet this year,  
then yet another time five twelvemonths hence.  
Indeed, her prophecy's not missed the mark:  
once proven true, it shall prove true again.  
Our friendship still has many days ahead.  
Why worry? Karma still binds us two fast."

Kiều said: "Yes, destiny can be foreseen:  
what she predicts shall doubtless come to pass.  
Should you encounter her along your road,  
please bid her tell my fortune yet ahead."  
Gladly the nun agreed to that request,  
then said goodbye and left for other parts.

Since she'd paid good for good or ill for ill,  
her soul's deep sea of wrongs soon ebbed away.  
She knelt before Lord Tứ to say her thanks:  
"Could this frail reed once hope to live this day?\*  
For me your lightning brought the wicked low  
and cast a load of sorrows off my soul.  
I've etched your favors in my heart, my bones—  
my life itself could not discharge such debts."

Tứ answered: "Down the ages have great men  
so often found that mate, that sister soul?  
And does a man live up to his proud name  
if he confronts a wrong and winks at it?  
Besides, it was a family matter, too!  
Need you bow low and offer me your thanks?  
But you still have your parents—I regret  
that you should dwell in Yüeh and they in Ch'in.  
May you rejoin them both beneath one roof  
and see their faces—then, I'll rest at ease."  
At his command, all gathered, spread the boards  
to celebrate the just redress of wrongs.  
Bamboos split fast; tiles slip, soon fall apart:\*

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nhơn-nhơn còn đứng chôn chân giữa vòng.  
Trơ như đá vững như đồng,  
ai lay chẳng chuyên ai rung chẳng dời.  
Quan-quân truy-sát đuổi dài,  
hầm-hầm sát-khi ngắt trời ai dang.  
Trong hào ngoài lùy tan-hoang,  
loạn-quân vừa đất tay náng đèn nơi.  
Trong vòng tên-dá bời-bời,  
thầy Tử còn đứng giữa trời trơ-trơ.  
Khóc ròng: "Trí dũng có thừa,  
'bời nghe lời thiếp nên cơ-hội này.  
"Nhà nào trông thầy nhau đây?  
"Thả liêu sông thác một ngày với nhau!"  
Dòng thu như giội cơn sầu,  
dứt lời nàng cũng gieo đầu một bên.  
Lạ thay oan-khí tương-triển!  
Nàng vừa phục xuồng Tử liền ngã ra.  
Quan-quân kề lại người qua,  
xót nàng sè lại vực ra dẩn-dẩn.  
Đem vào đèn trước trung-quân,  
Hỗ-công thấy mặt ân-cắn hối-han.  
Ròng: "Nàng chút phận hồng-nhan,  
"gap cơn binh-cách nhiều nàn cùng thương.  
"Đã hay thành-toán miếu-đường,  
"giúp công cùng có lời nàng mới nên.  
"Bây giờ sự đã vụn-tuyễn,  
"mặc lòng nghỉ lấy muôn xin bể nào?"  
Nàng càng giọt ngọc tuôn dào,  
ngáp-ngừng mời gửi thấp cao sự lòng.  
Ròng: "Tử là dũng anh-hùng,  
"đọc-ngang trời rộng vẩy-vùng bể khơi.  
"Tim tôi nên quá nghe lời,  
"đem thân bách-chiền làm tôi triều-định.  
"Ngờ là phu quý phụ vinh,  
"ai ngờ một phút tan-tành thịt-xương.  
"Năm năm trời bể ngang-tảng,  
"đã mình di bỏ chiền-trường như không.  
"Khéo khuyên kề lẫy lâm công,  
"kề bao nhiêu lại đau lòng bấy nhiêu.  
"Xét mình công ít tội nhiều,

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he still stood on his feet amidst his foes.  
His body, firm as rock and hard as bronze,  
who in the whole wide world could shake or move?  
Imperial troops rushed forward giving chase—  
death vapors choked the skies: who could resist?  
All battlements tumbled down, inside and out—  
some fleeing men found Kiều and led her there.  
As stones and arrows flew and whizzed around,  
Tử stood there still, transfixed, beneath the skies.  
"You had stout heart and clever mind," she cried,  
"but you took my advice and came to this!  
How can I bear to look you in the face?  
I'd rather die with you on this same day."  
Her pent-up grief gushed forth in floods of tears—  
she flung herself head first upon the ground.  
Oh, strange affinity of two wronged souls!  
As she collapsed, he too fell down with her.  
Some government soldiers now were walking past—  
sorry, they picked her up, helped her revive.  
To their headquarters they delivered her—  
Lord Hỗ caught sight of her and kindly spoke:  
"Defenseless, fragile woman that you are,  
you've been war-tossed and suffered grievous blows.  
Our plans, laid down at Court, won this campaign,  
but you did help—you talked the traitor round.  
Now all is well that has come off so well—  
I'll leave you free to choose your own reward."  
Her bitter tears poured forth, a flow of pearls—  
she heaved with sobs, unburdening her breast:  
"A hero was my Tử—he went his way  
beneath the skies, he roamed the open seas.  
I talked, he listened overtrusting me—  
the victor laid down arms to serve at court!  
He hoped to gain the world for man and wife—  
alas, he came to nothing in a trice.  
Five years he roved between the sky and sea,  
then dropped his body on the field like trash.  
Now you suggest I ask for my reward—  
the more you praise my act, the more I grieve.  
I judge myself a culprit, nothing less—

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"sông thưa tôi dà nên liêu minh tôi.  
"Xin cho tiện-thò một doi,  
"gọi là đắp-diêm lầy người tú-sinh."

Hồ-công nghe nói thương tinh,  
truyền cho cáo-táng di-hình bên sông.  
Trong quân mớ tiệc hạ-công.  
Xôn-xao tơ-trúc hội-đồng quân-quan.  
Bất nàng thị-yễn dưới màn,  
dở say lại ép cung đàn nhặt-tâu.  
Một cung gió thám mura sầu,  
bồn dây nhô máu nám đầu ngón tay.  
Vé ngâm vượn hót náo tayı,  
lọt tai Hồ cùng nhăn mày rơi chau.  
Hỏi rằng: "Này khúc ở đâu?  
"Nghe ra muôn oán nghìn sầu lầm thay!"  
Thưa rằng: "Bạc-Mệnh khúc này.  
"Phò vào đàn ấy những ngày còn thơ.  
"Cung cầm lụa những ngày xưa,  
"má gương bạc-mệnh bây giờ là dây."  
Nghe càng dăm ngắm càng say.  
Lạ cho mặt sắt cùng ngày vi tình!  
Đại rằng: "Hương-lúa ba sinh,  
"dây loan xin nỗi cảm lành cho ai."  
Thưa rằng: "Chút phận lạc-loài,  
"trong mình nghĩ đã có người thác oan.  
"Còn chi nứa cánh hoa tàn?  
"Tơ lòng đã dứt dây đàn Tiêu Lân.  
"Rộng thương còn mảnh hồng-quần,  
"hơi tàn được thấy gốc phẩn là may."  
Hồ-công chén đã quá say,  
Hồ-công đến lúc rạng ngày nhớ ra.  
Nghĩ: "Minh phuơng-diện quốc-gia,  
"quan trên nhắm xuồng người ta trông vào.  
"Phái tuồng trảng-giò hay sao?  
"Sự này biết tinh thê nào được dây?"  
Công-nha vừa buối sáng ngày,  
quyết tinh Hồ mới đoán ngay một bài.  
Lệnh quan ai dám cãi lời?  
Ép tinh mời gán cho người thò-quan.  
Ông tơ thật nhẽ da-doan,

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that's why I tried to end my futile life.  
Please give me just a paltry patch of earth  
to cover him I love in life and death."  
Her plea moved him—the lord had Tú's remains  
wrapped up in grass and buried by the stream.  
The troops proclaimed their victory with a feast.  
Strings twanged, flutes piped—all reveled and caroused.  
The lord forced Kiều to wait on him—half drunk,  
he bade her play the lute she'd daily played.

It moaned like wind and rain—five fingertips  
dripped blood upon four strings. When gibbons howl,  
cicadas wail, they cannot match such grief.  
Hồ listened, knitting brows and shedding tears.  
He asked: "What are you playing there? It sounds  
like all the world's dark sorrows rolled in one."  
"My lord, this tune's called *Cruel Fate*," she said.  
"I wrote it for the lute when I was young,  
in days long gone. But now, of cruel fate  
you have a victim under your own eyes."

Entranced, he heard her; spellbound, he watched her.  
O miracle, love disturbed an iron mask!  
"We're destined for each other," said the lord.\*  
"Let me restring your lute and make it whole."\*  
"I am a fallen woman," answered she.  
"My conscience bears a person's wrongful death.  
And what's there left of me, a faded flower?"  
My heartstrings broke just like Hsiao-lin's lute strings.\*  
Pity a woman—I'll bless my fortune if  
I see the elms back home before I die."

Flushed with success, Lord Hồ had drunk too much—but he regained his senses as light dawned.  
He thought, "I am a noble of the realm,  
whom both my betters and the rabble watch.  
Does it become a lord to toy with love?\*  
Now, how should I untangle this affair?"

So at the morning levee, he resolved  
to carry his expedient out forthwith.  
Who dare protest the word a mandarin speaks?  
Kiều was compelled to wed a tribal chief.  
How wayward you can be, O Marriage God,

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nhơn-nhơn còn đứng chôn chân giữa vòng  
Trơ như đá vững như đồng,  
ai lay chẳng chuyên ai rung chẳng dời.  
Quan-quân truy-sát đuổi dài,  
hầm-hầm sát-khi ngắt trời ai dang.  
Trong hào ngoài lùy tan-hoang,  
loạn-quân vừa dát tay nàng đền nỗi.  
Trong vòng tên-dá bời-bời,  
thầy Từ còn đứng giữa trời tro-tro.  
Khóc rắng: "Trí dũng có thừa,  
"bởi nghe lời thiếp nên cơ-hội này.  
"Mặt nào trông thầy nhau đây?  
"Thà liêu sông thác một ngày với nhau!"  
Dòng thu như giội cơn sầu,  
dứt lời nàng cùng gieo đầu một bên.  
Là thay oan-khi tương-triển!  
Nàng vừa phục xuồng Từ liền ngã ra.  
Quan-quân kề lại người qua,  
xót nàng sè lại vực ra dẩn-dẩn.  
Dem vào dền trước trung-quân,  
Hồ-công thây mặt ản-cấn hồi-han.  
Rắng: "Nàng chút phận hồng-nhan,  
"gặp cơn binh-cách nhiều nàn cùng thương.  
"Đã hay thành-toán miêu-đường,  
"giúp công cùng có lời nàng mời nén.  
"Bây giờ sự dâ vẹn-tuyễn,  
"mặc lòng nghỉ lấy muồn xin bê nào?"  
Nàng càng giọt ngọc tuôn dào,  
ngập-ngừng mới gửi thấp cao sự lòng.  
Rắng: "Tù là dâng anh-hùng,  
"đoc-ngang trời rộng vẩy-vùng bê khơi.  
"Tin tôi nên quá nghe lời,  
"đem thân bách-chiền làm tôi triều-dinh.  
"Ngờ là phu qui phụ vinh,  
"ai ngờ một phút tan-tành thịt-xương.  
"Năm năm trời bê ngang-tảng,  
"dẫn minh di bỏ chiền-trường như không.  
"Khéo khuyên kẽ lây làm công,  
"kẽ bao nhiêu lại đau lòng bấy nhiêu.  
"Xét mình công ít tội nhiều,

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he still stood on his feet amidst his foes.  
His body, firm as rock and hard as bronze,  
who in the whole wide world could shake or move?

Imperial troops rushed forward giving chase—  
death vapors choked the skies: who could resist?  
All battlements tumbled down, inside and out—  
some fleeing men found Kiều and led her there.  
As stones and arrows flew and whizzed around,  
Tù stood there still, transfixed, beneath the skies.

"You had stout heart and clever mind," she cried,  
"but you took my advice and came to this!  
How can I bear to look you in the face?  
I'd rather die with you on this same day."  
Her pent-up grief gushed forth in floods of tears—  
she flung herself head first upon the ground.  
Oh, strange affinity of two wronged souls!  
As she collapsed, he too fell down with her.

Some government soldiers now were walking past—  
sorry, they picked her up, helped her revive.  
To their headquarters they delivered her—  
Lord Hồ caught sight of her and kindly spoke:  
"Defenseless, fragile woman that you are,  
you've been war-tossed and suffered grievous blows.  
Our plans, laid down at Court, won this campaign,  
but you did help—you talked the traitor round.  
Now all is well that has come off so well—  
I'll leave you free to choose your own reward."

Her bitter tears poured forth, a flow of pearls—  
she heaved with sobs, unburdening her breast:  
"A hero was my Tù—he went his way  
beneath the skies, he roamed the open seas.  
I talked, he listened overtrusting me—  
the victor laid down arms to serve at court!  
He hoped to gain the world for man and wife—  
alas, he came to nothing in a trice.  
Five years he roved between the sky and sea,  
then dropped his body on the field like trash.  
Now you suggest I ask for my reward—  
the more you praise my act, the more I grieve.  
I judge myself a culprit, nothing less—

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"sông thà tôi đã nên liêu minh tôi.  
"Xin cho tiện-thò một doi,  
"gọi là đắp-diêm lầy người tử-sinh."  
Hồ-công nghe nói thương tình,  
truyền cho cáo-táng di-hình bên sông.  
Trong quân mờ tiệc hạ-công.  
Xôn-xao tơ-trúc hội-đồng quân-quan.  
Bất nàng thị-yên dưới màn,  
dở say lại ép cung đàn nhát-tấu.  
Một cung gió thám mưa sầu,  
bồn dây nhớ máu năm đầu ngón tay.  
Vé ngâm vượn hót náo tayı,  
lọt tai Hồ cũng nhận mày rơi chäu.  
Hỏi rằng: "Này khúc ở đâu?  
"Nghe ra muôn oán nghìn sầu lầm thay!"  
Thưa rằng: "Bạc-Mệnh khúc này.  
"Phó vào đàn ấy những ngày còn thơ.  
"Cung cầm lụa những ngày xưa,  
"mà gương bạc-mệnh bây giờ là đây."  
Nghe càng đắm ngâm càng say.  
Lạ cho mặt sát cùng ngày vì tình!  
Đại rằng: "Hương-lứa ba sinh,  
"dây loan xin nỗi cảm lành cho ai."  
Thưa rằng: "Chút phận lạc-loài,  
"trong mình nghỉ đã có người thác oan.  
"Còn chi nira cánh hoa tàn?  
"Tơ lòng đã dứt dây đàn Tiêu Lân.  
"Rộng thương còn mảnh hồng-quần,  
"hơi tàn được thầy gốc phẩn là may."  
Hà-công chén đã quá say,  
Hồ-công đèn lúc rạng ngày nhớ ra.  
Nghĩ: "Minh phuơng-diện quốc-gia,  
"quan trên nhảm xuồng người ta trông vào.  
"Phái tuồng trảng-giò hay sao?  
"Sự này biết tình thề nào được đây?"  
Công-nha vừa buồi sáng ngày,  
quyết tình Hồ mới đoán ngay một bài.  
Lệnh quan ai dám cãi lời?  
Ép tình mời gán cho người thò-quan.  
Ông tơ thật nhẽ đa-doan,

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that's why I tried to end my futile life.  
Please give me just a paltry patch of earth  
to cover him I love in life and death."  
Her plea moved him—the lord had Từ's remains  
wrapped up in grass and buried by the stream.  
The troops proclaimed their victory with a feast.  
Strings twanged, flutes piped—all reveled and caroused.  
The lord forced Kiều to wait on him—half drunk,  
he bade her play the lute she'd daily played.  
It moaned like wind and rain—five fingertips  
dripped blood upon four strings. When gibbons howl,  
cicadas wail, they cannot match such grief.  
Hồ listened, knitting brows and shedding tears.  
He asked: "What are you playing there? It sounds  
like all the world's dark sorrows rolled in one."  
"My lord, this tune's called *Cruel Fate*," she said.  
"I wrote it for the lute when I was young,  
in days long gone. But now, of cruel fate  
you have a victim under your own eyes."  
Entranced, he heard her; spellbound, he watched her.  
O miracle, love disturbed an iron mask!  
"We're destined for each other," said the lord.\*  
"Let me restring your lute and make it whole."\*\*  
"I am a fallen woman," answered she.  
"My conscience bears a person's wrongful death.  
And what's there left of me, a faded flower?"  
My heartstrings broke just like Hsiao-lin's lute strings.\*  
Pity a woman—I'll bless my fortune if  
I see the elms back home before I die."  
Flushed with success, Lord Hồ had drunk too much—  
but he regained his senses as light dawned.  
He thought, "I am a noble of the realm,  
whom both my betters and the rabble watch.  
Does it become a lord to toy with love?\*\*  
Now, how should I untangle this affair?"  
So at the morning levee, he resolved  
to carry his expedient out forthwith.  
Who dare protest the word a mandarin speaks?  
Kiều was compelled to wed a tribal chief.  
How wayward you can be, O Marriage God,

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xe tơ sao khéo vơ quăng vơ xiên!	2600
Kiều hoa áp thẳng xuồng thuyền, lá mản rú thấp ngọn đèn khêu cao.	
Nàng càng ú liễu phai đảo, trâm phấn nào có phấn nào phấn tươi.	2605
Danh thân cát đậm sóng vùi, cướp công cha-mẹ thiệt đời thông-minh.	
Chân trời mất bể lênh-dênh, nǎm xương biết gửi tử-sinh chôn nào?	2610
Duyên đâu ai dứt tơ đảo, nợ đâu ai dà đất vào tận tay.	
Thân sao thân dền thề này, còn ngày nào cùng dư ngày ây thôi.	2615
Đã không biết sống là vui, tâm thân nào biết thiệt-thời là thương.	
Một mình cay-dắng trăm đường, thôi thì nát ngọc tan vàng thi thôi.	2620
Mảnh trăng đã gác non doi, một mình luồng nhung đứng ngồi chưa xong.	
Triệu đâu nỗi tiếng dùng-dùng, hở ra mới biết rằng sông Tiên-dường.	2625
Nhớ lời thần-mộng rõ-ràng: "Này thôi hết kiếp đoạn-trường là đây.	
"Đạm Tiên nàng nhẹ có hay! "Hẹn ta thì đợi dưới này rước ta."	2630
Dưới đèn săn bức tiên hoa, một thiên tuyệt-bút gọi là đê sau.	
Cửa bồng vội mở rèm châu, trời cao sông rộng một màu bao-la.	2635
Rắng: "Tử-công hậu-dài ta, chút vì việc nước mà ra phụ lòng.	
"Giết chồng mà lại lấy chồng, mặt nào còn đứng ở trong cõi đời?	
"Thôi thi một thác cho rồi, tâm lòng phó mặc trên trời dưới sông."	
Trông với con nước mênh-mông, đem mình gieo xuống giữa dòng trường-giang.	
Thò-quan theo vội-vàng, thì đã đắm ngọc chim hương mắt rồi.	

at random tying couples with your threads!	2600
The bridal carriage took her to his boat— curtains came down, the nuptial lamp lit up.	
Willow all withered, peach blossom all seared— her freshness was all gone, not one spark left.	2605
Let waves and sands entomb her self, annul her parents' love and care, her gifts of mind.	
Mere flotsam seaworne toward the world's far bounds, where could she find a grave and rest her bones?	2610
Who had cut them, her silken threads of love? And who had clapped on her this debt of woe?	
How could a body sink to reach this state? Each day on earth was just a wasted day.	2615
If while alive the body knows no joy, why mourn a loss it will not know as loss?	
Alone, she felt a hundred stabs of pain— she would destroy herself and end it all.	2620
The moon had slipped behind the western hills— lonely, distraught, she walked and sat by turns.	
And then she heard the roar of rising tides— she asked and learned the river was Ch'ien-t'ang.	2625
She now recalled the name from her weird dream: "So here my life of griefs shall meet its term.	
Đạm Tiên, O friend, you know that I've kept tryst? You promised—wait and welcome me down there!"	2630
A sheet was lying ready by the lamp— she wrote a farewell poem as her will.	
Parting the beaded curtain, she looked out: high sky, broad stream—one all-pervading hue.	2635
"Lord Tử so kindly treated me," she thought, "yet I betrayed him, sold him to the state.	
I killed my man, then took another man— how can I live and show my face on earth?	
Why, I shall perish now and make an end. To waves and skies let me entrust my heart."	
She cast her eyes upon the shoreless space, then headlong hurled her body in mid-stream.	
The tribal chief rushed up to rescue her— the fragrant gem had sunken out of sight.*	

Thương thay cùng một kiếp người,  
hại thay mang lây sắc tài lâm chi!  
Nhưng là oan-khổ lưu-ly,  
chờ cho hết kiếp còn gì là thân.  
Mười lăm năm bầy nhiêu lần,  
làm gương cho khách hồng-quần thứ soi.  
Dời người đền thề thì thôi!  
Trong cơ âm cực dương hối khôn hay.  
Mấy người hiếu-nghĩa xưa nay,  
trời làm chi đền lâu ngày càng thương?

## VI

Giác Duyên từ tiết già nàng,  
deo bầu quây níp rộng đường vân-du.  
Gặp bà Tam Hợp dạo-cô,  
thong-dong hỏi hết nhở to sự nàng:  
"Người sao hiếu-nghĩa đủ đường,  
kiếp sao rật những đoạn-trường thề thôi?"  
Sư rằng: "Phúc họa đạo trời,  
cõi-nguồn cung ở lòng người mà ra.  
"Có trời mà cung tại ta.  
"Tu là cõi phúc tinh là dây oan.  
"Thùy Kiều sắc-são khôn-ngoan,  
"võ-duyên là phận hồng-nhan đã dành.  
"Lại mang lây một chừ tình,  
"khur-khur mình buộc lây mình vào trong.  
"Vậy nên những chồn thong-dong,  
"ở không yên-ôn ngồi không vững-vàng.  
"Ma đưa lôi qui đem đường,  
"lại tim những chồn đoạn-trường mà đi.  
"Hết nạn nọ đền nạn kia,  
"thanh-lâu hai lượt thanh-y hai lần.  
"Trong vòng giáo dựng gươm trấn,  
kể rằng hùm-sói gửi thân tôi-dời.  
"Giữa dòng nước dây sóng dối,  
trước hàm rồng cá gieo mồi vắng tanh.  
"Oan kia theo mài với tinh,  
một minh minh biết một minh minh hay.  
"Làm cho sông đọa thác dày,

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Pity a life, an all too human life,  
yet somehow cursed, alas, with charms and gifts.  
She wandered from one sorrow to the next—  
what would be left of her, at journey's end?  
For fifteen years, how often she held up  
a mirror where all women see themselves!  
None could have dropped to lower depths. But dawn  
succeeds the dark—who knows the wheels of fate?\*  
Must those true sons or daughters sorely grieve  
before high Heaven pities all their woes?

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Since taking leave of Kiều, with gourd and bag  
Giác Duyên had trod her trail among the clouds.  
She met Tam Hợp—at leisure she inquired  
about Kiều's destiny in full detail:  
"True daughter, faithful lover—she's proved both:  
why has she known but sorrow and distress?"

"Heaven gives weal or woe," the preacher said,  
"yet from the human heart it also springs.  
As Heaven shapes our fate we lend a hand.  
Renounce the world, reap joy—to lust spins grief.  
Kiều boasts a lavish share of charms and gifts,  
and woe befalls a rose as her set lot.

Moreover, she has woven passion's web  
wherein at pleasure she'll enmesh herself.  
Thus, when she dwelt in those abodes of peace,  
she would not stay, for she could not sit still.  
By fiends inspired, by demons led astray,  
she left and darted down the path of thorns.  
She raced from woe to woe—an inmate twice  
at those resorts of mirth, and twice a slave.\*  
Beset with bristling spears and naked swords,  
she served a wolf, she did a tiger's will.

Midstream, as surged wild waves, she threw herself  
to tempt fell dragons' jaws in their hushed depths.  
To passion sorrow clings and won't let go—  
only she knows her pain, feels it alone.  
On earth she suffers torments fit for hell,

"đoan-trường cho hết kiếp này mới thôi."

Giác Duyên nghe nói rung-ròi:

"Một đời nàng nhè thương ôi còn gi!"

Sư rằng: "Song chẳng hể chi.

"Nghệ-đuyên cân lại nhắc đi còn nhiều.

"Xét trong tội-nghiệp Thúy Kiều,

"mắc diêu tinh-ái khỏi diêu tà-dâm.

"Lãy tinh thâm trả nghĩa thâm,

"bán mình dâ động hiều-tâm dền trời.

"Hại một người cứu muôn người,

"biết đường khinh-trọng biết lời phái-chảng.

"Thứa công-đức ấy ai bằng?

"Túc-khiên đã rửa lâng-lâng sạch rồi.

"Khi nén trời cùng chiểu người,

"nhẹ-nhang nợ trước đền-bối duyên sau.

"Giác Duyên dẫu nhớ nghĩa nhau,

"Tiễn-đường thả một bè lau rước người.

"Trước sau cho vẹn một lời,

"duyên ta mà cùng phúc trời chi không."

Giác Duyên nghe nói mừng lòng,

lân-la tigm thú bèn sông Tiên-đường.

Đánh tranh chụm nóc thảo-đường,

một gian nước biếc mây vàng chia đôi.

Thuê năm ngư-phú hai người,

đóng thuyền chực bến kêt chài giăng sông.

Một lòng chẳng quán mầy công,

khéo thay gấp-gòi cùng trong chuyến-vấn!

Kiều từ gieo xuồng duênh ngắn,

nước xuôi bồng dâ trôi dần tận nơi.

Ngư-ông kéo lưới vớt người,

ngắm lời Tam Hợp rò mười chẳng ngoa.

Trên mui lướt-mướt áo là,

tuy dầm hơi nước chưa lòa bóng gương.

Giác Duyên nhận thật mặt nàng,

nàng còn thiêm-thiếp giắc vàng chưa phai.

Mơ-màng phách quẽ hôn mai,

Đạm Tiên thoát dâ thay người ngày xưa.

Rắng: "Tôi dâ có lòng chờ,

"mắt công mười mây năm thừa ở đây.

"Chị sao phận móng đúc dày!"

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and they shan't end until her lifetime ends."

Giác Duyên heard that dire warning, shook with dread:  
"Of such a life, alas, what will be left?"

"But all's not lost," the prophetess replied.

"On balance every action weighs and counts.

When judged for her past sins, Kiều must be charged  
with reckless love, but not with wanton lust.

Requiting love for love, she sold herself—  
a daughter's heart moved Heaven there on high.

She caused one death, but saved ten thousand lives.

She knew right thoughts from wrong, fair deeds from foul.  
Whose merits equal her good works, in truth?

They've all but washed away her sins of yore.  
Heaven will sometimes choose to humor man—

who's purged past faults is due for future joys.  
Giác Duyên, remember your own pledge to her—

for her please float a raft down the Ch'ien-t'ang.  
You'll thus redeem a promise you once made:

it falls on us to do what's Heaven-blessed."

Giác Duyên heard those good words—her heart rejoiced.

She went and settled on the Ch'ien-t'ang shore.

Braiding some thatch, she built her hut: a home  
between the emerald waves and golden clouds.

Year in year out, she hired two fishing men  
to wait with boat and fishnet stretched across.

She prayed with all her soul and grudged no pains:  
through Heaven's mill the meeting came to pass.

After Kiều plunged, she rode the silver stream—  
she drifted with the current, reached this spot.

The fishermen hauled their net, pulled her aboard—  
at last, Tam Hợp's prediction was fulfilled.

In her silk nighrobe dripping on the bow,  
though drenched, she had not lost the gleam of life.  
Giác Duyên could tell it was indeed Kiều's face,  
but she remained immersed in heavy sleep.

Her soul was wandering through a grove of dreams\*  
when from the past appeared a friend, Đạm Tiên.  
She said: "With love I've been awaiting you—  
I've spent ten years and more just haunting here.  
How frail your fate! Your virtues, though, how strong!"

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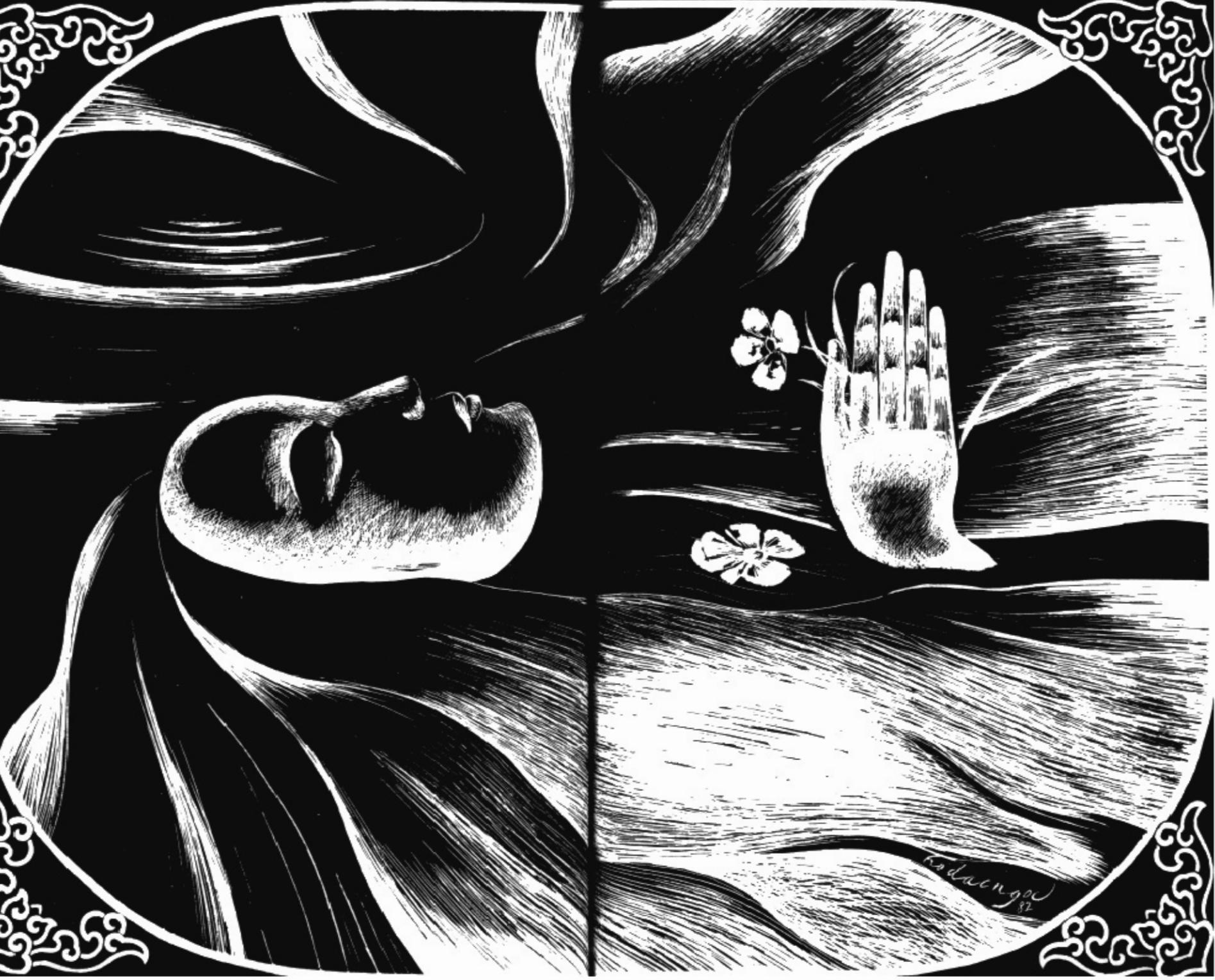
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"Kiếp xưa dà vây lồng này dẽ ai.  
"Tâm thành dà thấu đèn trời,  
"bán mình là hiêu cứu người là nhân.  
"Một niềm vi nước vi dân.  
"âm-công cắt một đống cân dã già.  
"Đoạn-trường só rút tên ra,  
"đoạn-trường thơ phải đưa mà trả nhau.  
"Còn nhiều hướm-thụ về lâu,  
"duyên xưa tròn-trận phúc sau dõi-dào."  
Nàng còn ngo-ngắn biết sao,  
"Trạc Tuyễn" nghe tiếng gọi vào bên tai.  
Giật mình thoát tính giấc mai,  
bảng-khuâng nào đã biết ai mà nhìn.  
Trong thuyền nào thấy Đạm Tiên,  
bên mình chỉ thấy Giác Duyên ngồi kế.  
Thầy nau u mừng-rờ trâm bể,  
dọn thuyền mới rước nắng về tháo-lư.  
Một nhà chung-chạ sớm trưa,  
gió-trảng mát mặt muối-dưa chay lồng.  
Bồn bê bát-ngát mènh-móng,  
triệu dâng hôm sớm mây lồng trước sau.  
Nạn xưa trút sạch lầu-lầu,  
duyên xưa chưa dẽ biết đâu chồn này.

Nỗi nang tai-nạn dà dãy,  
nỗi chàng Kim Trọng bầy chảy mới thương.  
Từ ngày muôn dặm phù-tang,  
nửa năm ở đất Liêu-dương lại nhà.  
Vội sang vườn Thúy dò-la,  
nhìn xem phong-cánh nay đã khác xưa.  
Đãy vườn có mọc lau thưa.  
Song trảng quanh-què vách mưa rã-rời.  
Trước sau nào thấy bóng người,  
hoa đào năm ngoái còn cười gió đông.  
Xập-xè én liệng lầu không,  
cỏ lan mạt đất rêu phong dẫu giày.  
Cuối tường gai-góc mọc dãy,  
đi vè này những lồi này năm xưa.  
Chung-quanh lặng ngắt như tờ,  
nỗi-niềm tâm-sự bây giờ hỏi ai?

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Who can match your true heart, despite past sins?  
Heaven has noticed it: a loving child,  
you sold yourself; an altruist, you saved lives.  
Your country and your people you served well.  
Such hidden merits have now tipped the scale.  
Your name's now struck from the Book of the Damned—  
your poems writ in sorrow I'll give back.  
With many days ahead, you shall fulfill  
your great past love, reap future happiness."

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Still dreamy, Kiều knew not what to believe  
when someone whispered in her ear, "Pure Spring!"  
She wakened with a start—bewildered and dazed,  
she failed to recognize a single face.

Đạm Tiên she could find nowhere in the boat,  
but at her side she soon could see Giác Duyên.

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Their mutual joy burst forth a hundred ways.  
They left the boat, went home to that grass hut.  
The two now shared one roof—the moon and wind  
cooled faces, while plain greens and salt cleansed hearts.  
A vast, vast space around—tides rose and fell  
from dawn to dusk within a cage of clouds.  
As Kiều shook off the filth of all past woes,  
how could her erstwhile love know she lived here?

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If Kiều had shouldered her full load of griefs,  
young Kim himself had suffered much the while.  
For mourning rites he'd made that far-flung trip  
and from Liao-yang came back in half a year.

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He hurried toward his dear Kingfisher's nest\*  
and took one startled look—the scene had changed.\*  
The garden was a patch of weeds and reeds.  
Hushed, moon-lit windows, weather-beaten walls.  
Not one lone soul—peach blossoms of last year  
were smiling, flirting yet with their east wind.\*  
Swallows were rustling through the vacant house.  
Grass clad the ground, moss hid all marks of shoes.  
At the wall's end, a clump of thorns and briars:  
this pathway both had walked a year ago.  
A silent chill was brooding over all—  
who could relieve the anguish of his heart?

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Láng-giêng có kè sang chơi, lán-la sè hỏi một hai sự-tình.	2755
Hỏi ông ông mắc tung-định, hỏi nàng nàng đà bắn minh chuộc cha.	
Hỏi nhà nhà đà dời xa, hỏi chàng Vương với cùng là Thùy Vân.	2760
Đều là sa-sút khò-khanh, may thuê viết mướn kiêm ăn lăn hối.	
Điều đâu sét đánh lung trồi, thoát nghe chàng thoát rụng-rời xiết bao.	2765
Hỏi thăm di-trú nơi nao, đánh đường chàng mới tìm vào tận nơi.	
Nhà tranh vách đất tá-tri, lau treo rèm nát trúc cài phen thưa.	
Một sân đất có dầm mưa, cảng ngao-ngán nỗi cảng ngo-ngán dường.	2770
Dánh liêu lên tiếng ngoài tường, chàng Vương nghe tiếng vội-vàng chạy ra.	
Dắt tay vội rước vào nhà, mé sau viên-ngoại ông-bà ra ngay.	
Khóc-than kẽ hêt niém tây: “Chàng ôi biết nỗi nước này cho chưa?	2775
“Kiều-nhi phận móng như tờ, “một lời dâ lõi tóc-tơ với chàng.	
“Gặp con gia-biền lạ dường, “bán mình nó phái tìm dường cứu cha.	2780
“Dùng-dâng khi bước chân ra, “cực trăm nghìn nỗi dàn ba bồn lẩn.	
“Trót lời nặng với lang-quân, “mướn con em nó Thùy Vân thay lời.	
“Goi là trả chút nghĩa người, “sầu này dâng-dặc muôn đời chưa quên.	2785
“Kiếp này duyên đà phụ duyên, “dâ-dài còn biết sè đến lai-sinh.	
“Mầy lời ký-chú dinh-ninh, “ghi lòng dê dẹt mình ra đi.	2790
“Phận sao bạc bãy Kiều-nhi! “Chàng Kim về dó con thi ở đâu?”	
Ông-bà cảng nói cảng đau, chàng cảng nghe nói cảng đau như dura.	

A neighbor happened by—approaching him, Kim asked some questions he discreetly phrased. Old Vương? He'd somehow tangled with the law. And Kiều? She'd sold herself to ransom him. The family? All had moved a long way off.	2755
And what about young Vương and young Thùy Vân? The two had fallen on hard days of need: he scribed, she sewed—both lived from hand to mouth.	2760
It was a firebolt striking from mid-sky: Kim heard the news, was staggered by it all.	
He asked and learned where all those folks had moved— he slowly found his way to their new home.	2765
A tattered hut, a roof of thatch, mud walls; reed blinds in rags, bamboo screens punched with holes; a rain-soaked yard where nothing grew but weeds: the sight distressed and shocked him all the more.	2770
Still, making bold, he called outside the wall. Young Vương, on hearing him, rushed out at once— he took him by the hand, led him inside. From their back room the parents soon appeared.	
They wept and wailed as they retold their woes: “Young man, you know what happened to us all? Our daughter Kiều is cursed by evil fate: she failed her word to you, her solemn troth.	2775
Disaster struck our family, forcing her to sell herself and save her father's life.	2780
How torn and wrenchéd she was when she left home! Grief-bowed, she told us time and time again: since she had sworn to you a sacred oath, she begged her sister Vân to take her place	
and in some way redeem her pledge to you. But her own sorrow will forever last.	2785
In this existence she broke faith with you— she'll make it up to you when she's reborn. These were the words she said and said again: we graved them in our souls before she left.	
O daughter Kiều, why does fate hurt you so? Your Kim is back with us, but where are you?”	2790
The more they spoke of Kiều, the more they grieved— the more Kim heard them speak, the more he ached.*	

Vật mình vầy giờ tuôn mưa,  
dẩm-dể giọt ngọc thẳn-thờ hồn mai.  
Đau đói đoạn ngắt đói thôi,  
tỉnh ra lại khóc khóc rồi lại mê.  
Thầy chàng đau nỗi biệt-ly,  
nhịn-ngừng ông mới vỗ-về giải-khuyên:  
“Bây giờ ván đã đóng thuyền,  
đã dành phận bạc khôn đến tinh chung.  
“Quá thương chút nghĩa đèo-bống,  
“nghìn vàng thân ây dẽ hỏng bó sao?”  
Dỗ-dành khuyên-giải trâm chiếu,  
lừa phiến càng dập càng khêu mồi phiển.  
Thế xưa giờ đèn kim-hoàn,  
cửa xưa lại giờ đèn dàn với hương.  
Sinh cảng trông thầy càng thương,  
gan cảng túc-tối ruột càng xót-xa.  
Rắng: “Tôi trót quá chán ra,  
đè cho đèn nỗi trôi hoa giặt bèo.  
“Cùng nhau thề-thốt đã nhiều,  
“những điều vàng-dá phải điều nói không.  
“Chưa chán-gõi cùng vợ-chồng,  
lòng nào mà nỡ dirt lòng cho dang?  
“Bao nhiêu của mày ngày đường,  
“còn tôi tôi một gắp nàng mới thôi.”  
Nỗi thương nói chẳng hết lời,  
tạ-tử sinh mới sụt-sùi trở ra.  
Vội vã sửa chồn vườn hoa,  
rước-mời viên-ngoại ông-bà cùng sang.  
Thẳn-hòn châm-chút lẽ thường,  
dường thân thay tấm lòng nàng ngày xưa.  
Đinh-ninh mài lê chép thư,  
cắt người tim-tỏi đưa tờ nhẫn-nhe.  
Biết bao công mướn của thuê,  
Lâm-thanh mày độ di vê dặm khơi.  
Người một nơi hỏi một nơi,  
mèn-mông nào biết bể trời nơi nao?  
Sinh cảng thám-thiết khát-khao,  
như nung gan sắt như báo lòng son.  
Ruột tằm ngày một héo-hon,  
tuyệt-sương ngày một hao-mòn minh ve.

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He writhed in agony, he sorely wept,  
his face tear-drowned and sorrow-crazed his mind.  
It hurt him so he fainted many times  
and, coming to, he shed more bitter tears.

When he saw Kim so desolate, old Vương  
curbed his own grief and sought to comfort him:  
“The plank’s now nailed and fastened to the boat.\*  
Ill-starred and doomed, she can’t requite your love.  
Although you care so much for her you’ve lost,  
must you throw off a life as good as gold?”

To soothe his pain, they tried a hundred ways—  
grief, smothered, flared and burned more fiercely yet.  
They showed him those gold bracelets from the past  
and other keepsakes: incense, that old lute.

The sight of them rekindled his despair—  
it roused his sorrow, rent his heart again.

“Because I had to go away,” he cried,  
“I let the fern, the flower float downstream.  
We two did take and swear our vows of troth,  
vows firm as bronze or stone, not idle words.  
Though we have shared no bed, we’re man and wife:  
how could I ever cast her from my heart?  
Whatever it may cost in gold, in time,  
I shall not quit until I see her face.”

He suffered more than all the words could say—  
stifling his sobs, he bade goodbye and left.  
He hurried home, arranged a garden lodge,  
then he went back to fetch Kiều’s parents there.  
He saw to their well-being day and night  
like their own son, in their lost daughter’s stead.

With ink and tears he wrote away for news—  
agents he sent and missives he dispatched.  
Who knows how much he spent on things, on men,  
and several times he trekked to far Lin-ch’ing.  
He would search here while she was staying there.  
Where should he look between the sky and sea?  
He yearned and pined—he seemed to have his soul  
inside a kiln, his heart beneath a plow.  
The silkworm, spinning, wasted day by day;  
the gaunt cicada, bit by frost, shrank more.

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Thǎn-thờ lúc tinh lúc mê, máu theo nước mắt hồn lia chiém-bao.	2835
Xuân-huyên lo-sợ xiết bao, quá ra khi đèn thê nào mà hay.	
Vội-vàng sắm-sứa chọn ngày, duyên Vân sóm dâ xe dây cho chǎng.	2840
Người yêu-diệu kè vân-chương, trai tài gái sắc xuân dang vừa thi.	
Tuy rằng vui chừ vu-qui, vui này dâ cất sầu kia được nào.	
Khi ăn-ở lúc ra vào, càng áu duyên mới càng dào tinh xưa.	2845
Nỗi nàng nhớ đèn bao giờ, tuôn cháu đòi trận vỏ tơ trâm vòng.	
Có khi vắng-vé thư-phòng, đốt lô hương giờ phím đồng ngày xưa.	2850
Bé-bại rú-ri tiếng tơ, trâm bay lạt khói gió đưa lay rèm.	
Dường như bên nóc bên them, tiếng kiều đồng-vọng bóng xiêm mơ-màng.	
Bời lòng tạc đá ghi vàng, tưởng nàng nên lại thấy nàng vẽ đáy.	2855
Nhưng là phiền-muộn đêm ngày, xuân thu biết dâ đổi-thay mây lẩn?	
Chè-khoa gặp hội trường văn, Vương Kim cùng chiêm bảng xuân một ngày.	2860
Cứa trời rộng mở đường mây, hoa chào ngõ hạnh hương bay đậm phấn.	
Chàng Vương nhớ đèn xa gần, sang nhà Chung-lão tạ án chu-tuyen.	2865
Tinh xưa ân trá nghĩa đèn, gia-thân lại mời kêt duyên Châu-Trần.	
Kim từ nhẹ bước thanh-vân, nỗi nàng càng nghĩ xa gần càng thương.	
Ây ai dǎn ngọc thể vàng? Bây giờ Kim-mả ngọc-đường với ai?	2870
Ngọn bèo chân sóng lạc-loài, nghĩ mình vinh-hiền thương người lưu-ly.	
Vâng ra ngoại-niệm Lâm-tri,	

He languished, half alive, half dead—he'd weep real tears of blood, but lose his soul to dreams.	2835
His parents took alarm because they feared* what, gone too far, his grief might lead him to. In haste they readied things and chose a date: an early marriage tied young Kim and Vân.	2840
A graceful girl, a brilliant scholar wed, uniting charms and gifts in their full flush. Though he found joy in matrimonial life, how could this happiness outweigh that grief?	
They lived together—as he came to care for his new union, surged his love of old. Whenever he remembered Kiều's ordeal, he wept and felt a tightened knot inside.	2845
At times, in his hushed study, he would light the incense burner, play the lute of yore.	2850
Silk strings would sigh sweet moans while scentwood smoke spread fragrant wisps and breezes stirred the blinds. Then, from the steps beneath the roof, he'd hear a girl's faint voice—he'd glimpse what seemed a skirt.	
Because he'd etched his love in stone and bronze, he'd dream of her and think she had come back.	2855
His days and nights were steeped in dismal gloom while spring and autumn wheeled and wheeled about. For learned men a contest now took place: young Vương and Kim attained the honor roll.*	2860
Heaven's broad gate swung open—flowers hailed them in His Majesty's park, fame reached their heaths.*	
Young Vương still kept in mind those days long past: he called on Chung to settle his great debt. He paid it off in full, then took to wife Chung's daughter, thus allying their two clans.	2865
As Kim stepped briskly on amidst blue clouds,* he thought of Kiều and sorrowed all the more. With whom had he exchanged those vows of troth?* With whom was he now sharing jade and gold?*	
Poor fern afloat down in the troughs of waves— with honors blessed, he mourned her wandering life.	2870
Then he was sent to serve in far Lin-tzu:	

quan-san nghin đậm thê-nhi một đoàn.	
Cẩm-đường ngày tháng thanh-nhàn, sòn khuya tiếng hạc tiếng đàn tiêu-dao.	2875
Phòng xuân trướng rú hoa dào, nàng Vân nằm bồng chiêm-bao thay nàng.	
Tinh ra mới rì cùng chàng, nghe lời chàng cùng hai đường tin nghi:	2880
“Nó Lâm-thanh với Lâm-tri, “khác nhau một chữ hoặc khi có lầm.	
“Trong cơ thanh khí tương tấm, “ở đây hoặc có giai-âm chàng là?”	
Tháng-đường chàng mới hỏi-tra, họ Đô có kẻ lại già thưa lên:	2885
“Sự này dà ngoại mười niên, “tôi dà biết mặt biết tên rành-rành.	
“Tú-bà cùng Mã Giám-sinh, “đi mua người ở Bắc-kinh đưa về.	2890
“Thúy Kiều tài sắc ai bì, “có nghề dán lại dứ nghề văn-thơ.	
“Kiên-trinh chàng phái gan vừa, “liêu minh thề ấy phái lừa thề kia.	
“Phong-trần chịu dà è-chě, “dày duyên sau lại xe về Thúc-lang.	2895
“Phái tay vợ cả phủ-phàng, “bắt về Võ-tích toan đường bê hoa.	
“Dứt mình nàng phái trồn ra, “chẳng may lại gặp một nhà Bạc kia.	2900
“Thoát buôn về thoát bán di, “mây trời béo nỗi thiều gi là nơi.	
“Bồng đâu lại gặp một người, “hơn đời trí dùng nghiêng trời uy-linh.	2905
“Trong tay mười vạn tinh-binh, “kéo về đóng chật một thành Lâm-tri.	
“Tóc-tơ các tích mọi khi, “oán thi trả oán ân thi trả ân.	
“Đã nên có nghĩa có nhân, “trước sau trọng-vẹn xa gần ngợi-khen.	2910
“Chưa từng được họ được tên, “sự này hỏi Thúc sinh-viên mới tưởng.”	
Nghe lời Đô nói rõ-ràng,	

with loved ones he trekked over hill and dale. Now, in his yamen, he lived leisured days* amidst the lute's sweet sounds, the crane's soft cries.*	2875
On a spring night, in her peach-curtained room, asleep Vân dreamed and saw her sister Kiều. When she awoke, she told her spouse at once. He wondered, torn between mistrust and hope: “Lin-ch'ing, Lin-tzu—they differ by one word: they may have been mistaken each for each. Two sisters, kindred souls, met in a dream— * perchance, we shall receive good tidings here.”	2880
Now, working in his office, he inquired. Old Đô, one of his clerks, gave this report: “It all began more than ten years ago— I knew them all quite well, each name, each face. Dame Tú and Scholar Mã went to Peking— they purchased Kiều and brought her back with them. In looks and gifts she stood without a peer.	2885
She played the lute and wrote both prose and verse. She wished to save her virtue, fiercely fought, and tried to kill herself, so they used tricks. She had to live in mud till she turned numb, then marriage ties attached her to young Thúc. But his first wife laid cruel hands on her and held her in Wu-hsi to nip the flower.	2890
When she betook herself from there and fled, bad luck would have her fall among the Bacs. No sooner caught than she was sold once more: a cloud, a fern, she drifted here and there. She happened on a man: he beat the world in wit and grit, shook heaven by sheer might. Leading a hundred thousand seasoned troops, he came and stationed them throughout Lin-tzu. Here Kiều cleared off all scores from her sad past: she rendered good for good or ill for ill.	2895
She proved her loyal heart, her kindly soul— she paid all debts, won praise from near and far. I did not get to know the hero's name— for this detail please query Scholar Thúc.”	2900
After he heard old Đô's clear-drawn account,	2905

túc-thi đưa thiếp mời chàng Thúc-sinh.  
 Nỗi nàng hỏi hêt phân-minh:  
 "Chỗng-con đâu tá tinh-danh là gì?"  
 Thúc rắng: "Gặp buổi loạn-ly,  
 "trong quân tôi hỏi thiều gi tóc-tơ.  
 "Đại-vương tên Hải họ Tù,  
 "đánh quen trăm trận súc dữ muôn người.  
 "Gặp nàng khī ở chūu Thai,  
 "lạ gi quoc-sắc thiên-tài phải duyên.  
 "Vây-vùng trong bầy nhiêu niênn,  
 "lám cho động-dịa kinh-thiên dùng-dùng.  
 "Đại-quân đón đóng cõi Đông,  
 "về sau chẳng biết vân-mòng làm sao."  
 Nghe tướng ngành-ngọn tiêu-hao,  
 lòng riêng chàng luồng lao-dao thẫn-thở:  
 "Xót thay chiếc lá bờ-vơ!  
 "Kiếp trần biệt giữ bao giờ cho xong?  
 "Hoa trôi nước chảy xuôi dòng,  
 "xót thân chim-nỗi đau lòng hợp-tan.  
 "Lời xưa đã lỗi muôn-vàn,  
 "mảnh hương còn đó phim dán còn dây.  
 "Đàn cầm khéo ngắn-ngo'r dây,  
 "lứa-hương biết có kiếp này nữa thôi?  
 "Bình-bống còn chút xa-xôi,  
 "đinh-chung sao nở ăn ngồi cho an?"  
 Rắp mong treo ẩn từ quan,  
 mây sông cũng lội mây ngàn cùng pha.  
 Giần minh trong áng can-quá,  
 vào sinh ra tử họa là thay nhau.  
 Nghĩ điêu trời thảm vực sâu,  
 bóng chim tām cá biết đâu mà nhìn.  
 Những là nǎn-ná đợi tin,  
 nắng-mưa biết đà mây phen đổi-dời.  
 Năm mây bồng thay chiểu trời,  
 khâm-ban sắc-chí đèn nơi rành-ranh.  
 Kim thi cái-nhậm Nam-binh,  
 chàng Vương cùng cái-nhậm thành Phù-duong.  
 Sắm-sanh xe-ngựa voi-vàng,  
 hai nhà cùng thuận một đường phó-quan.  
 Xáy nghe thè giác đà tan,

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Kim sent his card and bade Thúc visit him.  
 He asked his guest to settle dubious points:  
 "Where is Kiều's husband now? And what's his name?"

Thúc answered: "Caught in those wild times of strife,  
 I probed and asked some questions while at camp.  
 The chieftain's name was Hải, his surname Tù—  
 he won all battles, overwhelmed all foes.

He chanced to meet her while he was in T'ai—  
 genius and beauty wed, a natural course.  
 For many years he stormed about the world:  
 his thunder made earth quake and heaven quail!  
 He garrisoned his army in the East—  
 since then, all signs and clues of him are lost."

Kim heard and knew the story root and branch—  
 anguish and dread played havoc with his heart:  
 "Alas for my poor leaf, a toy of winds!

When could she ever shake the world's foul dust?  
 As flows the stream, the flower's swept along—  
 I grieve her wave-tossed life, detached from mine.  
 From all our broken pledges I still keep  
 a bit of incense there, and here this lute.

Its soul has fled the strings—will incense there  
 give us its fire and fragrance in this life?  
 While she's now wandering, rootless, far from home,  
 how can I wallow in soft ease and wealth?"

His seal of office he'd as soon resign—  
 then he would cross all streams and scale all heights,  
 then he would venture onto fields of war  
 and risk his life to look for his lost love.

But heaven showed no track, the sea no trail—  
 where could he seek the bird or find the fish?

While he was pausing, waiting for some news,  
 who knows how often cycled sun and rain?

Now from the throne, on rainbow-tinted sheets,  
 arrived decrees that clearly ordered thus:

Kim should assume new office in Nan-ping,  
 Vương was transferred to functions at Fu-yang.  
 In haste they purchased horse and carriage, then  
 both families left together for their posts.

The news broke out: The rebels had been crushed—

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sóng êm Phúc-kiền lửa tàn Chiết-giang.  
Được tin Kim mới rú Vương,  
tiện đường cùng lại tìm nàng sau xưa.  
Hàng-châu đèn đó bấy giờ,  
thật tin hối được tóc-tơ rành-rành.  
Rắng: "Ngày hôm nọ giao-binh,  
 thất-cor | Từ dâ thu-linh trận-tiễn.  
"Nhàng Kiều công cá chảng đèn,  
lệnh quan lại bắt ép duyên thô-tù.  
"Nhàng dâ gieo ngọc trâm châu,  
"sông Tiên-đường đó ây mõ hồng-nhan."  
Thương ôi không hợp mà tan!  
Một nhà vinh-hiền riêng oan một nàng.

Chiêu-hồn thiêt-vị lẽ thường,  
giải oan lập một dàn-tràng bên sông.  
Ngọn triều non bạc trùng-trùng,  
với trông còn tướng cánh hồng lúc gieo.  
Tinh thâm bê thảm lạ điếu,  
nào hồn tinh-vệ biết theo chôn nào?  
Cơ duyên đâu bỗng lạ sao,  
Giác Duyên đâu bỗng tìm vào đèn nơi.  
Trông lên linh-vị chữ bài,  
 thất-kinh | mới hỏi: "Những người đâu ta?  
"Với nàng thân-thích gần xa?  
"Người còn sao bỗng làm ma khóc người?"  
Nghe tin ngờ-ngác rụng-rời.  
Xùm quanh kề-lê rộn lời hỏi-tra:  
"Này chồng này mẹ này cha,  
này là em ruột này là em dâu.  
Thật tin nghe dâ bấy lâu,  
pháp-sư dạy thê sự đâu lạ đường!"  
Sư rằng: "Nhân-quả với nàng,  
Lâm-tri buổi trước Tiên-đường buổi sau.  
Khi nàng gieo ngọc trâm châu,  
đón nhau tôi dâ gặp nhau rước về.  
Cùng nhau nương cửa bồ-dề,  
thảo-am đó cũng gần kẽ chảng xa.  
Phật-tiến ngày bạc lân-la,  
dâm-dâm nàng cùng nhớ nhà khôn khuây."

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waves stilled, fires quenched in Fukien and Chekiang.  
Informed, Kim thereupon requested Vương  
to help him look for Kiều along the way.  
When they both reached Hang-chow, they could obtain  
precise and proven facts about her fate.  
This they were told: "One day, the fight was joined.  
Từ, ambushed, fell a martyr on the field.  
Kiều's signal service earned her no reward:  
by force they made her wed a tribal chief.  
She drowned that body fine as jade, as pearl:  
the Ch'ien-t'ang river has become her grave."  
Ah, torn asunder not to meet again!  
They all were thriving—she had died foul death.

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To rest her soul, they set her tablet up,  
installed an altar on the riverbank.  
The tide cast wave on silver-crested wave:  
gazing, all pictured how the bird had dropped.\*  
Deep love, a sea of griefs—so strange a fate!  
Where had it strayed, the bird's disconsolate soul?\*

How queerly fortune's wheel will turn and spin!  
Giác Duyên now somehow happened by the spot.  
She saw the tablet, read the written name.  
She cried, astonished: "Who are you, my friends?  
Are you perchance some kith or kin of hers?  
But she's alive! Why all these mourning rites?"

They heard the news and nearly fell with shock.  
All mobbed her, talked away, asked this and that:  
"Her husband here, her parents over there,  
and there her sister, brother, and his wife.  
From truthful sources we heard of her death,  
but now you tell us this amazing news!"

"Karma drew us together," said the nun,  
"first at Lin-tzu, and next by the Ch'ien-t'ang.  
When she would drown her beauteous body there,  
I stood at hand and brought her safe to shore.  
She's made her home within the Bodhi gate—  
our grass-roofed cloister's not too far from here.  
At Buddha's feet calm days go round and round,  
but her mind's eye still fastens on her home."

Nghe tin nở mặt nở mày,  
mừng nào lại quá mừng này nùa chặng?  
Từ phen chiếc lá lia rùng,  
thăm-tìm luồng những liệu chưng nước-mây.  
Rõ-ràng hoa rụng hương bay,  
kiếp sau họa thây kiếp này hán thôi.  
Minh-dương dôi ngả chắc rồi,  
cõi trần mà lại thây người cùu-nguyên!  
Cùng nhau lạy tạ Giác Duyên,  
bô-hành một lù theo liền một khi.  
Bè lau vạch cỏ tìm đi,  
tinh thảm luồng hây hổ-nghi nùa phẩn.  
Quanh-co theo dài giang-tân,  
khỏi rừng lau đã tới sân Phật-dường.  
Giác Duyên lên tiếng gọi nàng,  
buông trong vội đạo sen vàng bước ra.  
Nhìn xem dù mặt một nhà,  
xuân già còn khóc huyền già còn tươi,  
hai em phương-trường hòa hai,  
nó chàng Kim đó là người ngày xưa.  
Tường bảy giờ là bao giờ?  
Rõ-ràng mở mắt còn ngờ chiêm-bao.  
Giọt châu thánh-thót quen bão,  
mừng mừng túi túi xiết bao là tình.  
Huyền già dưới gối gieo mình,  
khóc-than mình kể sự minh đau đuối:  
"Từ con lưu-lạc quê người,  
"bèo trôi sóng vỗ chốc mười lăm năm.  
"Tính rằng sông-nước cát-lấm,  
"kiếp này ai lại còn cầm gập dây."  
Ông-bà trông mặt cầm tay,  
dung-quang chàng khác chi ngày bước ra.  
Bấy ch้าย dài nguyệt dấu hoa,  
mười phần xuân có gãy ba bốn phần.  
Nỗi mừng biết lấy gì cân?  
Lời tan-hợp chuyện xa-gắn thiều đâu.  
Hai em hỏi trước han sau,  
đứng trông chàng cũng trớ sầu làm tươi.  
Quây nhau lạy trước Phật-dài,  
tái-sinh trần-tạ lòng người từ-bi.

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At what was heard all faces glowed and beamed:  
could any bliss on earth exceed this joy?  
The leaf had left its grove—since that dark day,  
they'd vainly searched all streams and scanned all clouds.  
The rose had fallen, its sweet scent had failed:  
they might see her in afterworlds, not here.  
She'd gone the way of night, they dwelt with day—\*  
now, back from those Nine Springs, she walked on earth!\*

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All knelt and bowed their thanks to old Giác Duyên,  
then in a group they followed on her heels.  
They cut and cleared their way through reed and rush,  
their loving hearts half doubting yet her word.  
By twists and turns they edged along the shore,  
pushed past that jungle, reached the Buddha's shrine.  
In a loud voice, the nun Giác Duyên called Kiều,  
and from an inner room she hurried out.

She glanced and saw her folks—they all were here:  
Father looked still quite strong, and Mother spry;\*  
both sister Vân and brother Quan grown up;  
and over there was Kim, her love of yore.  
Could she believe this moment, what it seemed?  
Was she now dreaming open-eyed, awake?  
Tear-pearls dropped one by one and damped her smock—  
she felt such joy and grief, such grief and joy.

She cast herself upon her mother's knees\*  
and, weeping, told of all she had endured:  
"Since I set out to wander through strange lands,  
a wave-tossed fern, some fifteen years have passed.  
I sought to end it in the river's mud—  
who could have hoped to see you all on earth?"

The parents held her hands, admired her face:  
that face had not much changed since she left home.  
The moon, the flower, lashed by wind and rain  
for all that time, had lost some of its glow.  
What scale could ever weigh their happiness?  
Present and past, so much they talked about!  
The two young ones kept asking this or that  
while Kim looked on, his sorrow turned to joy.  
Before the Buddha's altar all knelt down  
and for Kiều's resurrection offered thanks.

Kiều hoa giục-giã túc-thì,  
Vương-ông dạy rước cùng về một nơi.  
Nàng rằng: "Chút phận hoa rơi,  
nửa đời nèm trái mọi mùi dâng-cay.  
"Tinh rằng mặt nước chân mây,  
lòng nào còn tướng có ráy nữa không?  
"Được ráy tái-thề tương-phùng,  
khát-khao đã thỏa tâm lòng lâu nay.  
"Đã đem minh bồ am mây,  
tuổi này gửi với cỏ-cây cung vừa.  
"Mùi thiền đã bén muỗi-dưa,  
màu thiền ẩn-mặc đã ưa nâu-sống.  
"Sư đời đã tắt lứa lòng,  
còn chen vào chôn bụi hồng làm chi?  
"Dở-dang nào có hay gi?  
"Đà tu tu trót qua thi thi thôi.  
"Trùng-sinh ân nặng bể trời,  
lòng nào nỡ dứt nghĩa người ra đị?"  
Ông rằng: "Bí thử nhất thi!  
Tu-hành thi cùng phái khi tòng quyển.  
"Phái điếu cầu Phật cầu tiên,  
tinh kia hiều nọ ai đến cho đây?  
"Độ-sinh nhờ đức cao-dày,  
lập am rồi sẽ rước thầy ở chung."  
Nghe lời nàng phái chiêu lòng,  
giá sú giả cảnh đều cùng bước ra.  
Một nhà về đêm quan-nha,  
đoàn-viên vội mở tiệc hoa vui-vầy.  
Tàng-tàng chén cúc dở say,  
đứng lên Vân mời giải-bày một hai.  
Rắng: "Trong tác-hợp cơ trời,  
hai bên gặp-gỡ một lời kết-giao.  
"Gặp cơn binh địa ba đảo  
vậy đem duyên chí buộc vào cho em.  
"Cùng là phận cái duyên kim,  
cùng là máu cháy ruột mềm chờ sao?  
"Những lá ráy ướt mai ao,  
mười lăm năm ấy biết bao nhiêu tình.  
"Bây giờ gương vờ lại lành,  
khuôn thiêng lứa-lộc đã dành có nơi.

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At once they ordered sedans decked with flowers—  
old Vương bade Kiều be carried home with them.

"I'm nothing but a fallen flower," she said.

"I drank of gall and wormwood half my life.

I thought to die on waves beneath the clouds—  
how could my heart nurse hopes to see this day?

Yet I've survived and met you all again,  
and slaked the thirst that long has parched my soul.

This cloister's now my refuge in the wilds—  
to live with grass and trees befits my age.

I'm used to salt and greens in Dhyana fare;  
I've grown to love the drab of Dhyana garb.

Within my heart the fire of lust is quenched—  
why should I roll again in worldly dust?

What good is that, a purpose half achieved?  
To nunhood vowed, I'll stay here till the end.

I owe to her who saved me sea-deep debts—

how can I cut my bonds with her and leave?"

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Old Vương exclaimed: "Other times, other tides!"\*  
Even a saint must bow to circumstance.\*

You worship gods and Buddhas—who'll discharge  
a daughter's duties, keep a lover's vows?

High Heaven saved your life—we'll build a shrine  
and have our Reverend come, live there near us."

Heeding her father's word, Kiều had to yield:  
she took her leave of cloister and old nun.

The group returned to Kim's own yamen where,  
for their reunion, they all held a feast.

After mum wine instilled a mellow mood,  
Vân rose and begged to air a thought or two:

"It's Heaven's own design that lovers meet,  
so Kim and Kiều did meet and swear their troth.  
Then, over peaceful earth wild billows swept,  
and in my sister's place I wedded him.

Amber and mustard seed, lodestone and pin!\*  
Besides, 'when blood is spilt, the gut turns soft.'\*

Day after day, we hoped and prayed for Kiều  
with so much love and grief these fifteen years.  
But now the mirror cracked is whole again:\*

wise Heaven's put her back where she belongs.\*

"Còn duyên may lại còn người,  
"còn vắng trăng cũ còn lời nguyền xưa.  
"Quá mai ba bảy đang vửa,  
"đào non sớm liệu xe tơ kịp thi!"  
Dứt lời nàng vội gạt đi:  
"Sự muôn năm cũ kề chi bây giờ?  
"Một lời tuy cổ ước xưa,  
"xét mình dài gió dẫu mưa đã nhiều.  
"Nói càng hổ-thẹn trăm chiêu,  
"thà cho ngọn nước thủy-triều cháy xuôi."  
Chàng rằng: "Nói cùng lả dời!  
"Đau lòng kia vậy còn lời ây sao?  
"Một lời dà trót thâm-giao,  
"dưới dày có đất trên cao có trời.  
"Đau rằng vật đổi sao dời,  
"tú-sinh cùng giữ lây lời tú-sinh.  
"Duyên kia có phụ chi tình,  
"mà toan xé gánh chung-tình làm hai?"  
Nàng rằng: "Gia-thắt duyên hải,  
"chút lòng ân-ái ai ai cùng lòng.  
"Nghĩ rằng trong đạo vợ-chồng,  
"hoa thơm phong nhị trăng vòng tròn gương.  
"Chữ trình dáng giá nghìn vàng,  
"đuốc hoa chẳng hẹn với chàng mai xưa?  
"Thiếp từ ngộ-biên đèn giờ,  
"ong qua bướm lại đã thura xâu-xa.  
"Bây chấy gió táp mưa sa,  
"mây trăng cũng khuyết mây hoa cũng tàn.  
"Còn chi là cái hồng-nhan?  
"Đà xong thân-thề còn toan nỗi nào?  
"Nghĩ mình chẳng hổ minh sao,  
"dám đem trấn-cầu dự vào bồ-kinh.  
"Đà hay chàng nặng vì tình,  
"trông hoa đèn chẳng hẹn mình lầm ru!  
"Từ rày khép cửa phòng thu,  
"chẳng tu thi cũng như tu mới là.  
"Chàng dấu nghỉ đèn tình xa,  
"đem tình cẩm-sát đổi ra cẩm-cờ.  
"Nói chi kết tóc xe tơ,  
"dã buồn cá ruột lại do cá dời."

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She still loves him and, luckily, still has him—  
still shines the same old moon both once swore by.  
The tree still bears some three or seven plums,\*  
the peach stays fresh—it's time to tie the knot!\*\*

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Kiều brushed her sister's speech aside and said:  
"Why now retell a tale of long ago?  
We once did pledge our troth, but since those days,  
my life has been exposed to wind and rain.

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I'd die of shame discussing what's now past—  
let those things flow downstream and out to sea!"

"A curious way to put it!" Kim cut in.  
"Whatever you may feel, your oath remains.  
A vow of troth is witnessed by the world,  
by earth below and heaven far above.  
Though things may change and stars may shift their course,  
sworn pledges must be kept in life or death.  
Does fate, which brought you back, oppose our love?  
We two are one—why split us in two halves?"

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"A home where love and concord reign," Kiều said.  
"whose heart won't yearn for it? But I believe  
that to her man a bride should bring the scent  
of a close bud, the shape of a full moon.  
It's priceless, chastity—by nuptial torch,  
am I to blush for what I'll offer you?

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Misfortune struck me—since that day the flower  
fell prey to bees and butterflies, ate shame.  
For so long lashed by rain and swept by wind,  
a flower's bound to fade, a moon to wane.

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My cheeks were once two roses—what's now left?  
My life is done—how can it be remade?

How dare I, boldfaced, soil with worldly filth  
the homespun costume of a virtuous wife?\*

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You bear a constant love for me, I know—  
but where to hide my shame by bridal light?  
From this day on I'll shut my chamber door:  
though I will take no vows, I'll live a nun.

If you still care for what we both once felt,  
let's turn it into friendship—let's be friends.\*  
Why speak of marriage with its red silk thread?\*  
It pains my heart and further stains my life."

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Chàng rằng: "Khéo nói nên lời!  
 "Mà trong lè phái có người có ta.  
 "Xưa nay trong đạo đàn bà,  
 "chữ trinh kia cũng có ba bảy đường.  
 "Có khi biến có khi thường,  
 "có quyền nào phải một đường chắp-kinh.  
 "Như nàng lầy hiếu làm trinh,  
 "bụi nào cho dục được mình ấy vay?  
 "Trời còn để có hôm nay,  
 "tan sương dấu ngõ vén mây giữa trời.  
 "Hoa tàn mà lại thêm tươi,  
 "trăng tàn mà lại hơn mười rằm xưa.  
 "Có diễu chi nữa mà ngờ,  
 "khách qua đường để hùng-hờ chàng Tiêu."  
 Nghe chàng nói đã hét diễu,  
 hai thân thi cùng quyết theo một bài.  
 Hết lời khôn lè chối lời,  
 cùi đầu nàng những vần dài thở-than.  
 Nhà vừa mở tiệc đoàn-viên,  
 hoa soi ngọn duốc hồng chen bức là.  
 Cùng nhau giao-bái một nhà,  
 lẽ dà đú lẽ đoi dà xứng đôi.  
 Động-phòng diu-dắt chén mới,  
 băng-khuêng duyên mới ngâm-ngùi tinh xưa.  
 Những từ sen ngô đào tơ,  
 mười lăm năm mới bảy giờ là đây.  
 Tình-duyên ấy hợp-tan này,  
 bi-hoan mày nỗi đêm chảy trắng cao.  
 Cảnh khuya bức gầm rú thao,  
 dưới đèn tỏ rạng má đào thêm xuân.  
 Tình-nhân lại gặp tình-nhân,  
 hoa xưa ong cũ mẩy phân chung-tình.  
 Nàng rằng: "Phận thiếp đã dành,  
 "có làm chi nữa cái mình bỏ đi.  
 "Nghỉ chàng nghĩa cũ tình ghi,  
 "chiều lòng gọi có xướng-tùy mày-may.  
 "Riêng lòng đã thẹn lắm thay,  
 "cùng dà mặt dạn mày dày khó coi.  
 "Nhưng như âu-yêm vành ngoài,  
 "còn toan mở mặt với người cho qua.

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"How skilled you are in spinning words!" Kim said.  
 "You have your reasons—others have their own.

Among those duties falling to her lot,  
 a woman's chastity means many things.  
 For there are times of ease and times of stress:  
 in crisis, must one rigid rule apply?  
 True daughter, you upheld a woman's role:  
 what dust or dirt could ever sully you?

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Heaven grants us this hour: now from our gate  
 all mists have cleared; on high, clouds roll away.  
 The faded flower's blooming forth afresh,  
 the waning moon shines more than at its full.  
 What is there left to doubt? Why treat me like  
 another Hsiao, a passerby ignored?"\*

He argued, pleaded, begged—she heard him through.  
 Her parents also settled on his plans.  
 Outtalked, she could no longer disagree:  
 she hung her head and yielded, stifling sighs.

They held a wedding-feast—bright candles lit  
 all flowers, set aglow the red silk rug.  
 Before their elders groom and bride bowed low—  
 all rites observed, they now were man and wife.

In their own room they traded toasts, still shy  
 of their new bond, yet moved by their old love.  
 Since he, a lotus sprout, first met with her,\*  
 a fresh peach bud, fifteen full years had fled.  
 To fall in love, to part, to reunite—  
 both felt mixed grief and joy as rose the moon.

The hour was late—the curtain dropped its fringe:  
 under the light gleamed her peach-blossom cheeks.  
 Two lovers met again—out of the past,  
 a bee, a flower constant in their love.

"I've made my peace with my own fate," she said.  
 "What can this cast-off body be good for?  
 I thought of your devotion to our past—  
 to please you, I went through those wedding rites.  
 But how ashamed I felt in my own heart,  
 lending a brazen front to all that show!  
 Don't go beyond the outward marks of love—  
 perhaps, I might then look you in the face.

"Lại như những thói người ta,  
"vớt hương dưới đất bé hoa cuối mùa.  
"Khéo là giờ nhuộc bày trò,  
"còn tình dâu nứa mà thù đây thôi.  
"Người yêu ta xấu với người,  
"yêu nhau thi lại bàng mười phụ nhau.  
"Cứa-nhà dẫu tính về sau,  
"thì còn em đó lợ cầu chị đây.  
"Chùa trinh còn một chút này,  
"chẳng cầm cho vừng lại giày cho tan.  
"Còn nhiều ân-ái chan-chan,  
"hay gi vầy cánh hoa tàn mà chơi?"  
Chẳng rằng: "Gắn-bó một lời,  
"bỗng không cá nước chim trời lờ nhau.  
"Xót người lưu-lạc bấy lâu,  
"tưởng thế-thót nặng cùng đau-dớn nhiều.  
"Thương nhau sinh-tử đâ liễu,  
"gặp nhau cồn chút bấy nhiêu là tình.  
"Chừng xuân tơ liễu còn xanh,  
"nghĩ rằng chưa thoát khỏi vành ái-ân.  
"Gương trong chẳng chút bụi trấn,  
"một lời quyết hẳn muôn phần kinh thê.  
"Bấy lâu đây bế mò kim,  
"là nhiều vàng-dá phái tim trắng-hoa?  
"Ai ngờ lại hợp một nhả,  
"lọ là chán-gỗi mới ra sắt-cầm."  
Nghe lời sưa áo cái trâm,  
khẩu-dầu lạy tạ cao-thâm nghìn trùng:  
"Thân tàn gạn dục khơi trong,  
"là nhớ quân-tử khác lòng người ta.  
"Mãy lời tâm-phúc ruột-rà,  
"tương-tri dường ây mới là tương-tri.  
"Chờ-che dùm-bọc thiểu gì,  
"trâm nám danh-tiết cùng vì đêm nay."  
Thoát khỏi tay lại cầm tay,  
càng yêu vì nết càng say vì tình.  
Thêm nền giá nỗi hương bình,  
cùng nhau lại chuộc chén quỳnh giao-hoan.  
Tình xưa lai-láng khôn hàn,  
thong-dong lại hỏi ngón đàn ngày xưa.

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But if you want to get what they all want,  
glean scent from dirt, or pluck a wilting flower,  
then we'll flaunt filth, put on a foul display,  
and only hate, not love, will then remain.  
When you make love and I feel only shame,  
then rank betrayal's better than such love.  
If you must give your clan a rightful heir,  
you have my sister—there's no need for me.  
What little chastity I may have saved,  
am I to fling it under trampling feet?  
More tender feelings pour from both our hearts—  
why toy and crumple up a faded flower?"

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"An oath bound us together," he replied.  
"We split, like fish to sea and bird to sky.  
Through your long exile how I grieved for you!  
Breaking your troth, you must have suffered so.  
We loved each other, risked our lives, braved death—  
now we two meet again, still deep in love.  
The willow in mid-spring still has green leaves—  
I thought you still attached to human love.  
But no more dust stains your clear mirror now:  
your vow can't but increase my high regard.  
If I long searched the sea for my lost pin,\*  
it was true love, not lust, that urged me on.\*  
We're back together now, beneath one roof:  
to live in concord, need two share one bed?" \*

Kiều pinned her hair and straightened up her gown,  
then knelt to touch her head in gratitude:  
"If ever my soiled body's cleansed of stains,  
I'll thank a gentleman, a noble soul.  
The words you spoke came from a kindred heart:  
no truer empathy between two souls.  
A home, a refuge—what won't you give me?  
My honor lives again as of tonight."

Their hands unclasped, then clasped and clasped again—  
now he esteemed her, loved her all the more.  
They lit another candle up, refilled  
the incense urn, then drank to their new joy.  
His old desire for her came flooding back—  
he softly asked about her luting skill.

Nàng rằng: "Vì mây đường tơ,  
"lầm người cho đèn bây giờ mới thôi.  
"Ăn-nân thi sự đã rồi,  
"nê lòng người cũ vắng lời một phen."  
Phím đàn dìu-dặt tay tiên,  
khoi trâm cao thấp tiếng huyền gần xa.  
Khúc đâu đầm-âm dương-hòa,  
ấy là hổ-diệp hay là Trang-sinh?  
Khúc đâu êm-ái xuân-tinh,  
ấy hồn Thục-đê hay minh đỗ-quyên?  
Trong sao chau nhô duênh quyên,  
âm sao hat ngọc Lam-diên mới đông.  
Lọt tai nghe suốt năm cung,  
tiếng nào là chẳng náo-nùng xôn-xao.  
Chàng rằng: "Phó ấy tay nào?  
"Xưa sao sầu-thám nay sao vui-vã?  
"Té vui bởi tại lòng này,  
"hay là khổ tận đèn ngày cam lai?"  
Nàng rằng: "Vi chút nghẽ chơi,  
"đoạn-trường tiếng ấy hại người bãy lâu.  
"Một phen tri-kỷ cùng nhau,  
"cuồn dây từ đây về sau cung chừa."  
Chuyện-trò chưa cạn tóc-tơ,  
gá đà gay sáng trời vừa rạng đông.  
Tinh riêng chàng lại nói sóng,  
một nhà ai cùng lạ-lùng khen-khao.  
Cho hay thục-nữ chí cao,  
phải người sớm mận tối đáo như ai?  
Hai tinh vẹn-về hòa hai,  
chẳng trong chǎn-gõi cũng ngoài cầm-thơ.  
Khi chén rượu khi cuộc cờ,  
khi xem hoa nở khi chờ trăng lên.  
Ba sinh đà phi mười nguyễn,  
duyên đôi-lứa cũng là duyên bạn-bầy.  
Nhớ lời lập một am mây,  
khiến người thân-tin rước thấy Giác Duyên.  
Đèn noi đóng cửa cái then,  
rêu trùm kẽ ngạch cỏ len mái nhà.  
Sư đà hái thuốc phương xa,  
mây bay hạc lánh biệt là tim đâu?

3195

3200

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"Those strings of silk entangled me," she said,  
"in sundry woes which haven't ceased till now.  
Alas, what's done regrets cannot undo—  
but I'll obey your wish just one more time."

3195

Her elfin fingers danced and swept the strings—  
sweet strains made waves with curls of scentwood smoke.  
Who sang this hymn to life and peace on earth?  
Was it a butterfly or Master Chuang?\*  
And who poured forth this rhapsody of love?  
The king of Shu or just a cuckoo-bird?\*  
Clear notes like pearls dropped in a moon-lit bay.  
Warm notes like crystals of new Lan-t'ien jade.\*

3200

His ears drank in all five tones of the scale—  
all sounds which stirred his heart and thrilled his soul.  
"Whose hand is playing that old tune?" he asked.  
"What sounded once so sad now sounds so gay!  
It's from within that joy or sorrow comes—  
have bitter days now set and sweet ones dawned?"  
"This pleasant little pastime," answered she,  
"once earned me grief and woe for many years.  
For you my lute just sang its one last song—  
henceforth, I'll roll its strings and play no more."

3205

3210

The secrets of their hearts were flowing still  
when cocks crowed up the morning in the east.  
Kim spoke, told all about their private pact.  
All marveled at her wish and lauded her—  
a woman of high mind, not some coquette  
who'd with her favors skip from man to man.\*

3215

Of love and friendship they fulfilled both claims—  
they shared no bed but joys of lute and verse.  
Now they sipped wine, now played a game of chess,  
admiring flowers, waiting for the moon.  
Their wishes all came true since fate so willed,  
and of two lovers marriage made two friends.

3220

3225

As pledged, they built a temple on a hill,  
then sent a trusted man to fetch the nun.  
When he got there, he found doors shut and barred—  
he saw a weed-grown rooftop, moss-filled cracks.  
She'd gone to gather simples, he was told:  
the cloud had flown, the crane had fled—but where?

3230

Nặng vì chút nghĩa bãy lâu,  
trên am cú giữ hương-dầu hôm mai.

Một nhà phúc lộc gồm hai.

Nghìn năm đằng-dặc quan-giai lấn-lấn.

Thừa-gia chẳng hết nàng Vân,  
một cây cù-mộc một sân quẽ-hòe.

Phong-lưu phú-quí ai bi?

Vườn xuân một cửa đê bia muôn đời.

3235

3240

Ngẫm hay muôn sự tại trời,  
trời kia đã bắt làm người có thân.

Bắt phong-trần phải phong-trần,  
cho thanh-cao mới được phần thanh-cao.

Có đâu thiên-vị người nào,  
chữ tài chữ mệnh đổi-dào cả hai.

Có tài mà cậy chi tài,  
chữ tài liền với chữ tai một vần.

Dà mang lây nghiệp vào thân,  
cùng đừng trách lẩn trời gần trời xa.

Thiện-cân ở tại lòng ta,  
chữ tâm kia mới bằng ba chữ tài.

3245

3250

Lời quê chắp-nhặt dông-dài,  
mua vui cùng được một vài trông canh.

For old times' sake, Kiều kept the temple lit,  
its incense candles burning night and day.

The twice-blessed home enjoyed both weal and wealth.

3235

Kim climbed the office ladder year by year.

Vân gave him many heirs: a stooping tree,\*

a yardful of sophoras and cassia shrubs.\*

In rank or riches who could rival them?

Their garden throve, won glory for all times.

3240

This we have learned: with Heaven rest all things.

Heaven appoints each human to a place.

If doomed to roll in dust, we'll roll in dust;  
we'll sit on high when destined for high seats.

Does Heaven ever favor anyone,  
bestowing both rare talent and good luck?

In talent take no overweening pride,  
for talent and disaster form a pair.\*

Our karma we must carry as our lot—  
let's stop decrying Heaven's whims and quirks.

Inside ourselves there lies the root of good:  
the heart outweighs all talents on this earth.

3245

3250

May these crude words, culled one by one and strung,  
beguile an hour or two of your long night.

## NOTES

Each number refers to a corresponding line in the English translation.

- 3 *a play of ebb and flow* / “an event [in which] the sea [becomes] mulberry [fields].” A passage in the Chinese collection entitled *Stories of Gods and Fairies* (*Shen Hsien Chuan*) reads: “Every thirty years, the vast sea turns into mulberry fields and mulberry fields turn into the vast sea.” Hence, the Vietnamese phrase “sea and mulberry” (*bè-dâu*) refers to some upheaval or profound change either in nature or in the affairs of men. See also note 715.
- 5 *losses balance gains* / “[who] is rich in this is poor in that” (*bl sắc tú phong*). The Chinese adage, which makes the common observation that no one is perfect or enjoys complete happiness, has a Vietnamese equivalent in a folk saying: “[who] gets this loses that” (*được cái này mất cái kia*).
- 6 *a rose* / “rosy cheeks” (*mà hồng*). The phrase refers to women, in general, and to beauties, in particular.
- 8 *old books* / “green chronicles” (*sứt xanh*). The phrase alludes to the ancient Chinese custom of recording events on green bamboo slips.
- 9 *Chia-ching* / the reign title of the Ming emperor Shih-tsung who ruled China from 1522 to 1566.
- 10 *both capitals* / Ming China had two capitals: Peking (the northern capital) and Nanking (the southern capital). Kiều’s family lived in Peking—this fact is not mentioned in the poem until Line 2043.
- 11 *a burgher* / a *yüan-wai* (*viên-ngoại*), the title for a commoner of some means in old China.  
*Vuong* / Wang in Chinese.
- 13 *Vuong Quan* / Wang Kuan in Chinese.
- 16 *Thúy Kiều . . . Thúy Vân* / Ts’ui-ch’iao and Ts’ui-yün in Chinese. In the original novel, the two sisters are portrayed as follows: “Both girls possessed great beauty and gentle natures, and were skilled in poetry. Ts’ui-ch’iao also had refined manners, loved beautiful things, and knew music, at which she excelled in the playing of the *hu-chín*. Heaven had endowed Ts’ui-yün with a sedate temperament . . . Ts’ui-ch’iao had eyelashes like willow leaves, eyes sparkling like jade, features like autumn streams, skin like peach blossoms. Ts’ui-yün was beautiful, too, but in a quiet, wholesome way.”

- 27 *A glance or two from her, and kingdoms rocked!* / “[With] one or two [glances she] toppled kingdoms [or] toppled city walls.” This is a paraphrase of two lines from a song by the Han poet Li Yen-nien (Lý Diên Niên).
- 31 *all five tones!* / The traditional Chinese scale has five tones: *kung* (C), *shang* (D), *chiao* (E), *chih* (G), and *yū* (A).
- 32 *the lute / the hu-ch'in (hồ-cám)* or “Hu stringed instrument.” The Hu are an ancient Tartar people of northwest China related to the Hsiung-nu. In modern Chinese, a *hu-ch'in* is a two-string violin used in Peking opera. But Nguyễn Du probably had in mind the *p'i-p'a* (*tỷ-bà*), a four-string, pear-shaped guitar, which looks rather like the European lute. In old China, it was the most popular of several “barbarian” instruments introduced by Central Asian nomads.
- Ai Chang!* / Ai Ju-chang (Ngai Nhu Trương), a musician celebrated in a Han song, *Ai Ju-chang*.
- 33 *Cruel Fate!* / “Thin Fate” (*Bac-mênh*). See also notes 411 and 753.
- 35 *womanhood!* / “red skirts [or trousers]” (*hồng-quần*), the attire of well-born women in old China. See also note 2157.
- 36 *that time when maidens pinned their hair!* / “the period [when one] gets to the hairpin” (*tuần cáp-kê*). In old China, girls ritually pinned up their hair on reaching the age of fifteen, as a sign that they were ready for marriage.
- 38 *woosers!* / “bees and butterflies” (*ong-bướm*). Cf. notes 1229 and 1586.
- the wall!* / the “east wall” (*tường đông*). In the *Mencius*, there is censure of a certain fellow who “climbed over the wall of neighbors to the east and tried to seduce their daughter.” An East Asian equivalent of the wall under Juliet’s balcony, the “east wall” has become the symbol of an illicit love tryst. See also notes 284 and 1093.
- 43 *the Feast of Light!* / Ch'ing-ming (“pure and bright”), a spring festival in old China, when people put graves in order and made offerings to the dead.
- 45 *merry pilgrims!* / “swallows and orioles” (*yến-anh*). Cf. note 64.
- 48 *a crush of clothes, a rush of wheels and steeds!* / “horses and carriages like water, upper and lower garments like *nen* grass.” *Nen* is a kind of grass with long, slender stems like tubes that grow packed together.
- 62 *Đam Tiễn!* / Tan-hsien in Chinese.
- 64 *lovers!* / “swallows and orioles” (*yến-anh*). Cf. note 45.
- 65 *roses!* / “rosy faces” (*hồng-nhan*). See also note 6.
- 70 *the pin had snapped, the vase had crashed!* / “the hairpin [had] broken, the [flower] vase [had] fallen” (*trâm gãy bình rơi*). This double metaphor of Chinese origin describes the death of a beautiful woman or of one's wife or ladylove. Cf. note 749.
- 71 *A death-still silence filled the void, her room!* / “the empty room was as still as a sheet.”

- 77 *a coffin!* / “a piece [made of] catalpa [wood]” (*nèp tùng*).
- a hearse!* / “a vehicle [decorated with] beads” (*xe châu*). Cf. note 921.
- 79 *For many moons!* / “Going through so many [times when] the hare dives [and] the crow dips,” i.e., through many moonsets and sunsets. According to Chinese mythology, there is a jade (or silver) hare on the moon and a golden crow on the sun.
- 82 *tears!* / “pearls” (*châu*).
- 86 *rose-fresh cheeks!* / “rosy cheeks” (*má hồng*). See also note 6.
- 89 *they ... who shared in her embrace!* / “men [who as] male phoenixes together shared the female phoenix.”
- 90 *they ... who lusted for her charms!* / “men [who] desired the green [and] craved the red [of her beauty].”
- 94 *the Yellow Springs!* / *suối vàng*, the nether world, also known as the Nine Springs (*cửu-nguyễn*, *cửu-tuyễn*, or *chin suối*). Cf. notes 710, 734, 1685, and 3000.
- 100 *four lines of stop-short verse!* / “four lines [with] three [words in the same] rhyme” (*bốn câu ba vần*). The *chüeh-chü* (“cut-off lines”) quatrain was invented by T'ang poets to express intense feelings in the most compact form.
- 108 *all women!* / “rosy faces” (*hồng-nhan*). See also notes 6, 65, and 86.
- 132 *an old-style poem!* / a *ku-shih* poem not subject to length, rhyme, and tone restrictions and therefore a better medium than the regulated poem (*lǜ-shih*) for expressing a flood of feelings and emotions.
- 133 *To leave or stay— they all were wavering still ...!* / Kim Trọng's appearance on the scene is described in a more perfunctory way in the Chinese novel: “While sisters and brother were still wavering between staying on and going home, they suddenly heard the sound of bells from a distance, and a young scholar riding a horse came toward them.”
- 137 *He carried poems packing half his bag!* / “[He] carried half a bagful of [poems about] the wind and the moon.” The Chinese phrase *bán nang phong nguyệt* (“half a bag of wind and moon”) refers to a poet's enjoyment of nature.
- 144 *some jade-and-ruby grove!* / “ruby trees [with] jasper branches” (*cây quỳnh cảnh đào*).
- 148 *Kim Trọng!* / Chin Chung in Chinese. According to the original novel, he “looked as handsome as P'an An [P'an Yo] and could improvise poems as fast as Tzu-chien [Ts'ao Chih]. Though he was only fifteen years of age, he already dreamed of marriage.”
- 156 *two beauties locked in their Bronze Sparrow Tower!* / In the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history, Ts'ao Ts'ao (155–220) of Wei vowed to defeat the state of Wu and capture the two beautiful Ch'iao sisters for the harem of his palace, the Bronze Sparrow Tower in Honan. But a favorable wind enabled Chou Yü, the young military

- commander of Wu, to destroy Ts'ao's fleet in 208 at a spot on the Yangtze called the Red Cliff. In a well-known quatrain, the T'ang poet Tu Mu (803–52) wrote: "Had the east wind not helped young Chou, the Bronze Sparrow / would have locked up two beauties in their spring."
- 159 *this season of new leaves*/ "the period [when people] challenge [one another] to guess leaves" (*tuân dō lá*). This may be a reference to the T'ang springtime game of breaking off a branch at random and guessing whether the number of leaves on it was even or odd as an omen of good or bad luck.
- 161 *He caught a fleeting glimpse of both afar*/ "[He] caught a fleeting glimpse of the red shadows in the distance." A "red shadow" (*bóng hồng*) is a beautiful woman glimpsed from a distance. See also note 35.
- 175 *East drooped a red camellia, toward the next house*/ . See note 38.
- 177 *the moon*/ "Ch'ang-o's shadow" (*bóng nga*). Ch'ang-o is the moon goddess of Chinese mythology.
- 190 *two golden lotus blooms*/ a beautiful woman's bound feet, according to the feminine aesthetics of old China. When his concubine, P'an Fei, danced on a floor decorated with golden lotus flowers, the Marquis of Tung-hun, sixth ruler of the southern Ch'i dynasty (479–501), said: "At every step a lotus blooms!"
- 192 *that Peach Blossom Spring*/ "Peach Blossom Spring," a prose piece written by the Chinese poet-recluse Tao Ch'ien (365–427), tells of a fisherman from Wu-ling who lost his way and wandered into a fairyland through a crack in the side of a hill, near where peach trees were in full bloom. After he returned to the world and reported his discovery, no one was able to find that blissful realm again.
- 193 *sister souls*/ "sound and spirit" (*thanh-khí*). This is a drastic condensation of a sentence from *The Book of Changes*: "[Those of] the same sound respond to each other, [and those of] the same spirit seek each other" (*Đồng thanh tương ứng đồng khí tương cùu*). The abbreviated phrase also refers to like minds, kin spirits, or people who have a special affinity for one another and feel at home together.
- 199 *our League Chief*/ the head of the Sorrow League. See note 200.
- 200 *the Book of the Damned*/ "the register of [those with] severed entrails" (*Số Đoan-trường*), which lists the membership of the Sorrow League or "the society of [those with] severed entrails" (*Hội Đoan-trường*): women of beauty or men of talent doomed by Heaven or other spiteful gods to a life of woe.
- 209 *the Book of Sorrow Songs*/ "the collection of [poems written by those with] severed entrails" (*Tập Đoan-trường*), an anthology of poems and songs by members of the Sorrow League. See note 200.
- 224 *her mother*/ "the house [where grows] the day lily" (*nha huyên*). The day lily stands for a loving, caring mother because its dried edible

- flowers (known as "golden needles" or *kim-châm*) are supposed to produce a soothing effect, which gives the plant a popular name: "the grass that makes one forget cares" (*vong-ru-thảo*).
- 226 *your cheeks like some pear blossoms drenched with rain*/ The beautiful Lady Yang in tears is thus described by the T'ang poet Po Chü-yi (772–846) in "A Song of Everlasting Sorrow."
- 238 *her tears*/ "the flow of the Hsiang" (*mạch Tương*). The Hsiang river metaphorically means "tears of sorrow" because, according to tradition, it was on its bank that the two sisters O-huang (Nga Hoàng) and Nü-ying (Nữ Anh) wasted away mourning their common husband, the sage-king Shun (*Thuấn*).
- 240 *over the wall a catkin flew next door*/ This line may be interpreted as foreshadowing Kiều's love tryst with Kim Trọng in his lodgings. See note 38.
- 243 *How strange, the race of lovers!*/ In the Chinese novel, Chin Chung's thoughts after meeting the two sisters are rendered as follows: "Speaking of Chin Chung, after he had taken leave of Ts'ui-ch'iao and her sister, he dreamed of them day and night, trying in vain to figure out some way of meeting the two beauties again. Then, one day, he came to his senses in a jolt: 'But I have been all wrong! They live in one place and I in another—even if there is some fateful tie between us, we shall not find it easy to meet. So I need to rent a house right next door to theirs, allegedly for a study-room, and, who knows, some happy opportunity may occur.'"
- 253 *icy, metal-cold*/ "the frosty air cold as copper" (*hở giáng như đồng*).
- 255 *Hsiang bamboo blinds*/ "blinds of Hsiang (bamboo)" (*mành Tương*). The Ladies of the Hsiang mourned their beloved husband and wept so much that their tears stained bamboos growing along the riverbank: this is the mythological origin of a rare species of bamboos with speckles on their stems. See also note 238.
- 257 *If fate did not mean them to join as mates*/ "If [we two were] not bound together by the debt of three existences." Once fate has destined a man and a woman for each other, they are sure to become mates—if not in this lifetime, then over the next two reincarnations. Bound by "fateful ties" (*duyên*), they owe each other a "debt" (*no*) which must be paid off in the course of "three existences" (*ba sinh*).
- 258 *why had the temptress come and teased his eyes?*/ "why [had she] come with [her] trick of toppling city walls to tease the pupils of [his] eyes?" For "toppling city walls" (*khuynh-thành*), see note 27. The word *nguvì*, understood as "the pupil or apple of the eye," seems to fit the context perfectly, but some editors prefer to treat it as a variant of *nguvì* ("a person," "a man") with the change in tone imposed by a prosodic requirement of six-eight verse.
- 266 *her Blue Bridge*/ According to Taoist lore, an unsuccessful T'ang

- scholar, P'ei Hang (Bùi Hàng) met a nymph-like girl, Yün-ying (Vân Anh), near Lan-ch'iao (the "Blue Bridge") in Lan-t'ien, Shensi, and eventually wedded her. The Blue Bridge—in Vietnamese, *Lam-kiều* or *cầu Lam*—has come to mean a place where one encounters a beautiful girl whom one is to marry. Cf. note 457.
- 267 *no stream for his red leaf*] A T'ang man found a red leaf on a stream flowing out of the Imperial Palace: it carried a poem by a member of the imperial harem. He wrote a poem in reply on the same leaf and, going upstream floated it back into the palace; by chance, the woman found it. Later, she was discharged from the harem. The two met, fell in love, got married to discover that they had written to each other before. The woman said in a poem: "Now we know that a red leaf makes a good go-between." The red leaf (*lá thắm* or *hồng-diệp*) has become a metaphor for love as foreordained by fate.
- 268 *no passage for his bluebird bearing word*] The Queen Mother of the West (Hsi Wang Mu), the highest goddess in the Chinese Taoist pantheon, used bluebirds as messengers. In romantic literature, the bluebird is the harbinger of love.
- 275 *heathen climes*] "Wu and Yüeh." As ancient kingdoms in China, Wu corresponded roughly to the province of Kiangsu and Yüeh to the province of Kwangtung.
- 280 "Kingfisher View"/ *Thúy*, in *Thúy Kiều*, means "kingfisher."
- 282 *It must be Heaven's will that we should meet!*] "This must be some [manifestation] of Heaven's [will] to bind [us] together [in the course of] three existences!" See note 257.
- 284 *that east wall*] See note 38.
- 285 *spring*] Peach Blossom Spring, where live immortals. See note 192.
- grotto*] The grotto on Mount T'ien-t'ai (Thiên-thai) in Chekiang, where according to Chinese folklore Liu Ch'en (Lưu Thần) and Yüan Chao (Nguyễn Triều) met and fell in love with nymphs under the Han dynasty.
- 286 *the nymph*] "the red shadow." See note 161.
- 306 *I would send back the pearl, but where's Ho-p'u?*] Ho-p'u (Hợp-phò) in Chiao-chou (or in present-day Kwangtung), was once renowned for its pearl fisheries, but, unhappy with a despotic governor, native pearl divers fled the area. As pearl fishing decreased, people said that the pearls had gone away. Upon the appointment of a wiser, kinder governor who replaced the tyrant, the divers returned, and pearl fishing thrived again: people said that the pearls had come back to Ho-p'u. The saying, "The pearl has come back to Ho-p'u" (*Châu về Hợp-phò*), means that what was lost has been returned to its rightful owner or come back where it belongs.
- 327 *For months I dreamt my goddess in the clouds*] "For full months it was

- as if [I had been] sent to the palace in the clouds." This refers to Ch'ango, the moon goddess, who epitomizes feminine beauty.
- 328 *lovelorn. I hugged my post, prepared to drown*] A young man named Wei, waiting for a tryst with a girl who failed to show up, stubbornly stayed under a bridge, clasping a post, until he drowned in the rising tide.
- 330 *will on a leaf of grass the mirror shine?*] "will the mirror on its stand shine upon the trace of a duckweed or not?" *Bèo* (a duckweed, a water fern, or any small floating aquatic plant) is an image recurring throughout the poem to describe a girl or woman doomed to a wandering, rootless life. But in this particular instance it is a metaphor for someone worthless. The folk simile "cheap as duckweed" (*rẻ như bèo*) means "dirt cheap."
- 333 *love/ "the red leaf"* (*lá thắm*). See note 267.
- the marriage bond*] "the crimson [or red] thread" (*chi hồng* or *xích-thẳng*), a silk thread spun by the Marriage God to tie a man and a woman together in wedlock. See also note 549.
- 343 *Heaven*] "the sacred potter's wheel" (*khuôn thiêng*).
- 352 *stone and bronze*] *dá-vàng*. See note 513.
- 357 *a sunflower-figured fan*] The fan stands for the female sex, probably throughout the world and certainly in East Asia. The sunflower, which always turns to the sun (the *yang* or male principle), is a symbol of women's submission and faithfulness to their husbands, according to Confucian ethics.
- 365 *The Hsiang, the stream of longing tears, ran low: / he waited at the*
- 66 *spring, she at the mouth.*] The inspiration for these two lines comes from an old Chinese song: "He stays at the source of the Hsiang. / She stays at the mouth of the Hsiang. / Unseeing, both yearn for each other, / Both drink the water of the Hsiang." For the mythological origin of the Hsiang river as a symbol of lovelorn grief, see notes 238 and 255.
- 391 *the fairy cave*] "the cave with the [flowering] peach trees" (*động dào*). See note 192.
- 392 *Paradise*] "[Mount] T'ien-t'ai." See note 285.
- 406 *Pan*] This is an allusion to one of two famous Chinese women of letters. Lady Pan (Pan Chieh-yü or Ban Tiệp-dư) was for a long time a favorite consort of the Han emperor Ch'eng (33–7 B.C.). She received the title "Chieh-yü" as the imperial concubine who most distinguished herself in literature. In the first century A.D., under the Eastern Han dynasty, Pan Chao (Ban Chiêu) was such an accomplished scholar and writer that, upon the death of her brother, the historian Pan Ku (Ban Cố), she could go on and bring to completion the great work in which she had assisted him during his life.

*Hsieh*/ Under the Tsin dynasty, Hsieh Tao-yün (Tạ Đạo Uân) knew her classics so well that her erudition impressed even her uncle Hsieh An (Tạ An, A.D. 320–85), the most famous member of a brilliant family of scholars.

410 *wear jade*/ “[be in] the court [of those who] wear jade.” In China, aristocrats and high officials “wore jade” (*ngọc-bội*), i.e., they put on jade insignia as badges of rank.

*cross the Golden Gate*/ “[belong to] the group [of people who walk] the road to the Golden Gate.” The Golden Gate (*Kim-môn*) or Golden Horse Gate (*Kim-mâ-môn*) was an entrance to the Imperial Palace, where high court officials waited for an audience with the Han emperor Wu.

411 *I deem my own lot a mayfly's wing*/ “[I] think my own lot is [as] thin [as] a dragonfly's wing.” A “thin lot” (*phận mỏng*) is one marked by poverty, misfortune, etc. See also notes 33 and 753.

412 *Heaven*/ “the blue potter's wheel” (*khuôn xanh*).

422 *I'll keep my troth and sacrifice my life*. / “[I'll] take [what's etched in] bronze [vàng] and stone [đá] and with it risk [my] person.” See note 513.

426 *the sun*/ “the crow” (*ác*). See note 79.

434 *curtains*/ “curtains with fireflies” (*trường huỳnh*). Under the Tsin dynasty, Ch'è Yin (Trác Dận) was so poor that he could not afford oil for a lamp, so at night he read by the light of fireflies he had caught and kept in a bag. This diligent student passed his examinations and rose to high office, retiring with the title of duke. A reference to fireflies (or glowworms) is a classical metaphor for a student's life. Doân Hành, a 15th-century Vietnamese scholar, alluded to the story in a quatrain in Chinese, entitled “Fireflies”: “At night, around the house, some twinkling stars. / After the rain, on ponds, some flickering flames. / They know I've lost the will that moved Duke Ch'è: / they all fly past my window, unafraid.” (*The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry*, an anthology edited and translated by Huỳnh Sanh Thông. [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979].

439 *Wu-hsia*/ “the peak of Hsia” (*dinh Hiệp*). In the preface to a *fu* attributed to Sung Yü, the king of Ch'u (Sở), while visiting Mount Kao-t'ang (Cao-dùròng), met a nymph in a dream—they made love together. Afterward, she told him that she came from the fairy mountain of Wu-hsia (Vu-hiệp), where she made clouds at dawn and rains at evening. The phrase “clouds and rains” (*mây-mưa*) has become a metaphor for sexual intercourse. For more about Sung Yü, see note 1232.

457 *The pestle's yet to pound on the Blue Bridge*/ In plain language, “I am not yet married to you.” P'ei Hang (see note 266), wishing to marry the beautiful Yün-ying, was told by her grandmother that he must first produce a mortar and a pestle made of jade that could be used for

pounding special ingredients and preparing a magic drug. He managed to purchase those implements, brought them to the old woman, and was asked to pound some medicine for a hundred days: it became the elixir of life. He and the girl were allowed to wed, drink the elixir, and achieve immortality.

459 *the red leaf*/ *hồng-diệp*. See note 267.

*the crimson thread*/ *xích-thăng*. See note 333.

464 *Chung Tzu-ch'i* “Chung Ch'i” (Chung Kỳ). In the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history, Po Ya (Bà Nha) was a subtle lutanist, and the only man who could appreciate each and every nuance of his playing was Chung Tzu-ch'i (Chung Tú Kỳ). Upon Chung's death, Po smashed his lute and played no more, having lost the “friend who understood his music” (*bạn tri-âm*).

473 *The Battlefield of Han and Ch'u* After the downfall of the Ch'in dynasty, Liu Pang (Lưu Bang) of Han and Hsiang Yü (Hang Vũ) of Ch'u fought each other bitterly for control of China. Liu triumphed and founded the Han dynasty in 206 B.C.

475 *The Ssu-ma tune, A Phoenix Seeks His Mate* The Han writer Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju (Tư Mã Tường Như, 179–17 B.C.) played that tune on the lute and captured the heart of a young widow, Cho Wen-chün (Trác Văn Quân): she eloped with him against her rich father's wishes.

477 *Here was Chi K'ang's famed masterpiece, Kuang-ling* In the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history, Chi K'ang (Kê Khang, 223–62) of Wei was one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*Trúc Lâm Thủ Hiển*). He distinguished himself both as a lutanist and as a theorist of lute-playing, and his favorite piece was *Kuang-ling*, which a Taoist priest or immortal had taught him. Strictly speaking, Kiều could not have played that tune because, according to tradition, Chi K'ang was under oath not to teach it to anybody else, and it is assumed to have disappeared with him when he fell a victim to political persecution.

479 *Crossing the Border-gate—here was Chao-chün, / half lonesome for her lord, half sick for home*. / Chao-chün (Chiêu Quân) was the courtesy name of Wang Ch'iang (Vương Tường), a lady in the Han emperor Yüan's harem. To placate the Tartar khan who demanded a Chinese bride in 33 B.C., the emperor sent her into exile among barbarians. This incident, embroidered with fanciful or supernatural details, is often exploited in Chinese literature. It is the subject of a 13th-century play by Ma Chih-yüan, *Autumn in the Palace of Han* (translated by Donald Keene and available in Cyril Birch, *Anthology of Chinese Literature* [New York: Grove Press, 1965]).

505 *you've named me your bride*/ “[you] have admitted [me] to the rank of [one who wears a skirt of] coarse cloth and a thorn [for a hairpin].” The phrase “coarse cloth and a thorn” (*bô-kinh*), which is an abbreviation of “a skirt of coarse cloth and a thorn for a hairpin” (*bô quần kinh*

- thoa*), stands for virtuous wifehood according to Confucian ethics. *to serve her man/* “[to perform her] duty of submission to [her] husband.” A woman’s obedience to her husband (*tòng-phu*) is one of the “three obediences” (*tam-tòng*) prescribed for her by Confucian ethics. See also notes 2217 and 2329.
- 507 *They play in mulberry groves along the P’u/* In ancient China, mulberry groves along the P’u river (which flows through Shantung) served as trysting places for lovers and thus acquired a notorious reputation. The phrase “among mulberry trees on the P’u” (*tiang gian Bột thührung* or, in Vietnamese, *trên Bột trong dâu*) has come to mean lax sexual mores symptomatic of moral and social decadence.
- 509 *to snatch the moment, pluck the fruit/* “to eat an instantly fixed dish and live for the moment” (*án xôi ở thi*). The proverbial phrase refers disapprovingly to those who follow the *carpe diem* way of life and take no thought of the morrow.
- 512 *Ts’ui and Chang/* The two most famous lovers in Chinese literature, Ts’ui Ying-ying (Thôi Oanh Oanh) and Chang Chun-jui (Trương Quân Thụy) are the heroine and hero of a bittersweet, semi-autobiographical tale in prose by the T’ang poet Yüan Chen (779–831). It was turned by Wang Shih-fu (active at the end of the 13th century and beginning of the 14th) into a dramatic masterpiece, *Hsi Hsiang Chi*. Both the play and the original tale can be found in S. I. Hsiung, trans., *The Romance of the Western Chamber* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). In the 19th century, Lý Văn Phúc (1785–1849) or Nguyễn Lê Quang, or both, adapted the play into a tale in Vietnamese six-eight verse.
- 513 *passion’s storms/* “clouds and rains” (*mây-mưa*). See note 439.
- stone and bronze/* “stone and gold” (*dá-vàng*). In old Vietnamese writings, the word *vàng* was used broadly like the Chinese word *kim* to include gold and other metals, in particular bronze, which looks like gold. The phrase “stone and bronze” or “bronze and stone” (*vàng-dá* or, in Chinese, *kim-thạch*) refers to faithfulness, loyalty, strength of conviction, firmness of purpose, etc.
- 515 *wing to wéng and limb to limb they lay/* This is an allusion to the love affair between Emperor Ming-huang and Lady Yang as described by Po Chü-yí (Bach Cử Di) in “A Song of Everlasting Sorrow” (*Trường Hận Ca*).
- 519 *cast the shuttle in defense/* Under the Tsin dynasty, a fellow named Hsieh Kun (Tạ Côn) bothered a girl with his amorous attentions while she was working at the loom. To drive him away, she hurled the shuttle in his face, breaking his teeth. That did not deter him, however: he went on wooing her and eventually won her hand. To “cast the shuttle” (*gioe thoï*), from the Chinese phrase “to cast the shuttle in resistance”

(*dâu thoả chi cư*), is to take drastic steps in defense of one’s womanly virtue.

- 533 *Liao-yang/* a subprefecture in what is now Liaoning Province in Northeast China.
- 534 *Father/* “the house [where grows] a cedrela” (*xuân-duường*). The cedrela or fragrant cedar (*xuân*) stands for the father.
- 540 *to tie the marriage tie/* “to hand over the silk thread” (*trao tơ*). The silk thread as a symbol of marriage is primarily connected with the myth of the Marriage God (see also notes 333 and 687). But the phrase “to hand over the silk thread,” though no doubt related to that myth, comes more directly from an incident that allegedly took place under the T’ang. A young and brilliant scholar, Kuo Yüan-chen (Quách Nguyên Chân), wished to marry into the family of Prime Minister Chang Chia-cheng (Trương Gia Trinh), who had five daughters. The father had the five girls stand hidden behind a curtain, each showing a silk thread of a different color. Kuo picked the girl with the red thread, and it was a happy choice: she turned out to be the third daughter, the prettiest and most accomplished one.
- 549 *he . . . who spins silk threads/* “the old man [who spins] silk [threads]” (*ông tơ*), the Marriage God. See also notes 333 and 687.
- 555 *I’ll never leave / and play my lute aboard another’s boat/* In “A Ballad – 56 of the Lute” (*Tý-bà Hành*), the T’ang poet Po Chü-yí (Bach Cử Di) tells of his chance meeting with a courtesan who, once celebrated for her looks and lute-playing in the capital city of Ch’ang-an, was now the lonely wife of an often-absent tea merchant and played the lute by herself on her houseboat. Playwrights elaborated this simple incident into a love story involving Po himself as a central figure: he was supposed to have had in Ch’ang-an a passionate affair with the courtesan, who swore eternal love to him but eventually let herself be sold to the tea merchant. Based on this fictitious episode, “to carry one’s lute aboard another boat” (*ôm cầm sang thuyền khác*) is to leave one’s lover or one’s husband for someone else. For other uses of the lute as a symbol of love and union between a man and a woman, cf. notes 1400, 2582, and 2586.
- 576 *bailiffs/* yamen runners, official errand boys and messengers, a mandarin’s underlings and henchmen (*sai-nha*). In traditional China and Vietnam, those lowly members of the bureaucracy came into daily contact with the people and represented the law in their eyes—they were even more feared and hated than their superiors, the mandarins, who usually kept their distance from the vulgar masses. See also note 597–98.
- 578 *fiends and monsters/* “buffalo heads and horse faces” (*dâu trâu mặt ngựa*), torturers in Buddhist hell.

- 581 *bluebottles buzzing through the house*/ Bluebottles (*ruồi xanh* or *nhặng*) are hustlers who will stoop to anything for gain and profit. The line is reminiscent of a proverbial simile: “to hustle and bustle like a bluebottle fly going into a privy” (*bảng-nhở như nhặng vào chuồng tiếu*). To take bribes is to “eat dirt” (*án bẩn*).
- 588 *Some knave who sold raw silk had brought a charge.*/ According to the Chinese novel, this was how the Wang family ran afoul of the law. A member of the clan unknowingly harbored two robbers who claimed to be silk merchants. When they were exposed, the kinsman was arrested, and because old Wang had been hobnobbing with them he was also implicated.
- 597 *Lawmen behaved that day as is their wont, / wreaking dire havoc just for money's sake.*/ The fact that a mandarin's subordinates often terrorized the populace is recorded in this proverb among others: “The mandarin lets you go, but his office catches you” (*Quan tha nha bắt*). Serving as intermediaries between a corrupt official and his victims, they were in a splendid position to play petty tyrants as well as to line their pockets. To see them in action, as described in traditional literature, read “The Catfish and the Toad” in *The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry*, ed. Huỳnh, pp. 57–67.
- 607 *Chung*/ also Chung in Chinese.
- 608 *a bureaucrat who somehow had a heart*/ “[someone who] was also in the yamen service but had a compassionate heart” (cf. notes 576 and 597–98). In the Chinese novel, old Chung portrayed himself as follows: “Though my body finds itself in a yamen, my mouth still eats no meat and still prays to the Buddha.” When Ts'ui-ch'iao offered him fifty liang of silver as a token of her gratitude, he turned down the present. Instead, he adopted her as his daughter.
- 616 *misfortune, like a storm, swooped down on her*/ “[she] met a disaster coming on the wind unexpectedly.” A “disaster that comes flying on the wind” (*vợ gió tai bay*) could be a natural calamity, an act of God, but more often than not something visited upon innocent heads by the arbitrary power or cupidity of men who represented and enforced the law.
- 619 *A raindrop does not brood on its poor fate*/ This comparison of Kiều to a raindrop (*hat mưa*) echoes the following folk poem, which vividly depicts the uncertain, precarious fate of women in a world dominated by men: “My body is like a drop from a downpour. / It may fall into a well or into a flower garden. / My body is like a drop of falling rain. / It may land inside a mansion or end out in a slushy field” (*Thân em như hạt mưa dào. / Hạt rơi xuống giềng hạt vào vườn hoa. / Thân em như hạt mưa sa. / Hạt vào dài-các hạt ra ruộng lầy*).
- 620 *a leaf of grass repays three months of spring*/ This comes from two lines in “A Wanderer's Song” by the T'ang poet Meng Chiao (751–814):

- “Who says that a son's heart, an inch of grass, / can ever full requite the glow of spring?” Although Meng's poem is about a man's grateful remembrance of his mother, spring as a metaphor can refer to either parent or both: one owes one's life to one's father and one's mother even as grass owes its growth to the three warm months of spring.
- 625 *Scholar*/ “Giám-sinh” (in Chinese, *Chien-sheng*), someone who was or had been a student at the Imperial (or National) College (*Quốc-tú-giam*, or, in Chinese, *Kuo-tzu-chien*). *Má*/ Ma in Chinese.
- 626 *Lin-ch'ing*/ the main city of a subprefecture of the same name in Shantung.
- 643 *For jade I've come to this Blue Bridge*/ In plain language, “I've come here to buy a beautiful bride.” See also notes 266 and 457.
- 648 *the price for her, four hundred and some liang*/ The word *vàng* is used here to mean “precious metal” or “money” and not “gold”: the currency involved in the transaction was silver. In the Chinese novel, Scholar Ma agreed to pay 500 liang for Ts'ui-ch'iao, but later in the contract it was somehow reduced to 450. When he turned over the sum, he tried surreptitiously to withhold five liang, but she discovered his ploy and insisted on the full amount.
- 649 *All was smooth paddling*/ “The boat was smoothly [rowed] with the paddle” (*Thuyền dâ êm giám*).
- 657 *find/a fitting match*/ “give the silk thread to a fitting match.” See note –540.
- wed a worthy mate*/ “toss the ball to a worthy place.” According to tradition, the Han emperor Wu had his daughter throw down a ball from her tower to a group of suitors gathered below: the one who caught the ball won her hand.
- 667 *she softly spoke / and with some words of comfort calmed him down*/ In –68 the Chinese novel, old Wang refused to sign the marriage contract and sell his daughter, so she banged her head against a pillar and lost consciousness. She had to be revived, and only then did he go along with the deal.
- 671 *Ying*/ Under the reign of the Han emperor Wen, Ch'un-yü I (Thuấn Vu Ý), a man without a son, was sentenced to death. The condemned man's daughter, T'i-ying (Đê Oanh), threw herself at the emperor's feet to present her petition, offering to become a public bondservant. The ruler, moved by her filial piety, pardoned the father.
- 672 *Li*/ Under the reign of the Han emperor Wu, a girl named Li Chi (Lý Ký) wanted to earn money for her poor parents. She sold herself to be used as a human sacrifice to a snake demon. She slew the monster and so impressed the king of Yüeh with her feat that he made her his queen.
- 673 *As it grows old*/ “[as] the crane's age gets higher.” Probably because its white plumage suggests hoary hair, the crane symbolizes old age. The

- "crane's age" (*tuổi hạc* or, in Chinese, *hàc-thọ*) is long life.
- the cedar*/ The cedrela or fragrant cedar (*xuân*) stands for the father. See note 534.
- 686 *silver*/ *vàng*. See note 648.
- 687 *the Old Man of the Moon*/ the Marriage God. According to Chinese folklore, under the T'ang, a fellow named Wei Ku (Vi Cõ) saw an old man reading under the moon and carrying a bag full of red threads. He asked about their use and was told that they were for tying men and women together. The old man thus revealed himself as the Marriage God and has become known as the "Old Man of the Moon" (*nguyệt-lão* or, in Vietnamese, *trăng già*). See also notes 333 and 549.
- 708 *a beast*/ "a buffalo [or] a horse" (*trâu-ngựa*).
- make amends*/ "repay the debt of the love between a bamboo and plum tree" (*dền nghĩa trúc-mai*). The bamboo (*trúc*) and the plum tree (*mai*), which can survive the bitter cold of winter and thrive, symbolize enduring friendship or faithful love. Nguyễn Văn Vinh gives a plausible twist to the phrase *trúc-mai* by interpreting *trúc* and *mai* as two varieties of bamboos growing together in harmony. Indeed, *mai* is a bamboo with stems thicker than those of *trúc* but thinner than those of *buvong*. See also notes 746 and 1381.
- 710 *my heart will stay a crystal down below*/ "the crystal of love, carried down to the palace of the [Nine] Springs, will not melt as yet." (The palace of the Nine Springs (*tuyến-dài*) is the world of the dead. See notes 94, 710, 734, 1685, and 3000.) According to a Chinese story, a girl was in love with a traveling merchant. As he failed to come back from one of his trips, she missed him so much that she wasted away and died. When she was cremated, it was discovered that her heart had turned into a hard rock, like ruby. Upon his return, the merchant wept for the girl. His tears fell on the crystal, and it dissolved into blood. There is a Vietnamese version of the story, a folktale with a dramatic twist. A king's daughter was captivated by the singing voice of a boatman, named Trương Chi, who rowed his boat past her riverside mansion every day. Lovesick, she wanted to see him. Face to face with him, however, she was cured because she found him far less attractive than she had imagined from his voice. Now, in his turn, he was smitten with the princess and eventually died of unrequited passion. In the grave, his heart was transformed into a ruby, a "crystal of love" (*khôi tình*), which was later found and fashioned into a drinking cup. The princess received the cup as a present. When she poured tea into it, she saw the reflection of a boatman forlornly rowing his boat. Now realizing what she had done to the boatman she wept, and as her tears touched the cup it melted away.
- 715 *flux and change*/ "mulberry [fields turning into] the sea" (*dâu-bè*). See note 3.

- 726 *let me trust you to mend and splice what's left*/ "[I'll] leave it to [you], younger sister, to splice up what's left of the [broken] silk thread [with] some phoenix-glue." According to Taoist mythology, phoenix glue (*keo loan*) is a magic adhesive prepared from the blood of a female phoenix (*loan*) and can be used to mend even snapped bowstrings. About the silk thread (*tr*), love, and marriage, see notes 333, 540, and 2242.
- 732 *my pledge*/ "the word [I swore in sight of] streams and hills" (*lời nước-non*).
- 734 *down there*/ "[in the region of] the Nine Springs" (*chín suối*). See notes 94, 710, 1685, and 3000.
- 746 *to keep my pledge*/ "to repay the debt of love between a bamboo and a plum tree" (*dền nghĩa trúc-mai*). See notes 708 and 1381.
- I'll have turned to naught*/ "the body of the rush or the willow [will have] gone to pieces." Rushes and willows (*bô-liêu*) stand for women as weak, frail creatures.
- 749 *the pin has snapped, the vase has crashed*/ "the hairpin has snapped, the [flower] vase has broken to pieces" (*trâm gãy bình tan*). See note 70.
- 753 *a lot as gray as dirt*/ "a lot as white as lime" (*phân bắc như vôi*). There is a subtle play, virtually untranslatable, on the word *bắc*. As the Vietnamese form of the Chinese word *po*, it means "thin, slight, scant, poor" and, figuratively, "poor in feeling, ungrateful, unfaithful, harsh, cruel"; therefore, *phân bắc* is a poor lot in life or a harsh fate. But as a different word, related to *bạch* (*pai*, in Chinese), it means "white," and *bắc như vôi* is "as white as lime." In East Asian tradition, white is the color of disloyalty—traitors wear white make-up (often consisting of lime or *vôi*) in opera. As a result, *bắc* ("white") in *bắc như vôi* takes on the connotation of the other *bắc* ("cruel," "treacherous"). In brief, to have "a lot as white as lime" is to be doomed by a wanton fate to a life of sorrows. See also notes 33 and 411.
- 759 *the parents*/ "the cedrela and the day lily" (*xuân-huyền*). See notes 224 and 534.
- 769 *lovers ... must part*/ "the mustard [seed must] fall away [from amber] and the pin [must] drop off [from lodestone]." The attraction between amber and a mustard seed or between lodestone and an iron pin is symbolic of karmic affinity and love. See also note 3067.
- 770 *our child must lead a wanderer's life*/ "the child [is to] float and drift [like] a water fern [or] a cloud."
- 782 *parting tugged their hearts*/ "the silk threads, taken away, [wrenched and] wore out the silkworms." See note 2242.
- 793 *the east wind*/ the wind that blows in spring and therefore favors love.
- 809 *Tù*/ Hsiu in Chinese.
- 812 *sawdust and bitter melon*/ *mặt cua muối dâng*. The proverbial phrase refers to a pair of well-matched swindlers. Although of rather un-

- certain origin, it is sometimes explained as follows: a hawker who palmed off sawdust (*mat cù-a*) as rice bran on unsuspecting customers came across another who peddled bitter melons (*muóp dâng*) as cucumbers—they traded their goods, duping each other.
- 814 *to sell their painted dolls/* “to deal in powder and sell perfume” (*buôn phàn bàn hương*). This is an elegant euphemism for prostitution. A franker description of the oldest profession is “to sell one’s rump and feed one’s mouth” (*bán tròn nuôi miệng*). Cf. note 2140.
- 823 *The flag has come to hand!/* This alludes to the proverb, “Who holds the flag in hand waves it” (*Cờ đèn tay ai người iây phất*). In this context, it means, “Who has seized an opportunity is free to use it to best advantage; who holds power wields it as he or she chooses.”
- 839 *some yokel/* “[some] black little boy” (*con den*). “Black” (*den*) refers to the skin color of people who have to work out in the sun and soil their hands and feet with mud. Members of the ruling classes used to call peasants and their like “dumb folks with black butts” (*dần ngu khu den*). Here, of course, “a black little boy” is someone as unsophisticated as a country hick and easy to fool.
- 844 ... if I don’t touch her, later she’ll suspect./ Scholar Mâ’s interior monologue corresponds to the following passage in the Chinese novel: “‘Hmm, today I’ve got hold of that rare beauty whom I’ll take back to the shop. If some fellow wishes to be the one to open the box and doesn’t come up with a few hundred liang, why, let him not count on it! ... But at present I’ve not yet got out of town. If I don’t consummate the marriage with her, she might report it to her parents and make trouble. I think I’d better do it... and once back at the shop I’ll just use some make-up and have it look intact again—no worry that the box-opening bonus won’t fall smack into my purse. Why shouldn’t I take first crack at her, then? If that Hsiu woman gets to know about it, I’ll just spend an hour on my knees, and it all will blow over.’”
- 858 *She grabbed the knife and thought to kill herself./* In the Chinese novel, Ts’ui-ch’iao thought to commit suicide even before Scholar Ma consummated the marriage: judging from his obvious reluctance to get intimate with her, she suspected that he was saving her for a brothel. But she gave up the idea, reasoning that to kill herself now, while she was still a virgin bride, would give him cause to raise objections with her parents and demand his money back.
- 874 *mother/* *nha huyên*. See note 224.
- 879 *water’s mud and dust’s soil-free/* “water is muddy and dust is clear” (*nước đục bụi trong*). This is a straight translation of the Chinese phrase *trọc thủy thanh trân*. It implies that innocent people are victimized by a corrupt society.
- 902 *a vine/* “a creeping vine [or] a rattan” (*cát-dâng*). See notes 1350 and 1480.

- 918 *reminded her of her old folks/* “stirred in [her] heart [feelings for the two persons she was supposed to care for in the] morning [and in the] evening.” “Morning and evening” (*thân-hôn*) is a condensation of the Chinese phrase “to settle [one’s parents in bed in the] evening [and inquire about their health in the] morning” (*hỗn định thân tĩnh*) and always suggests solicitous concern for one’s parents’ welfare on a daily basis.
- 920 *Lin-tzu/* the main city of a subprefecture of the same name in Shantung. Once the capital of the state of Ch’i, it was a prosperous, sophisticated town with a high standard of living.
- 921 *the carriage/* “the vehicle [decorated with] beads” (*xe châu*). Cf. note 77.
- 931 *bawdyhouses/* “green pavilions” (*lầu xanh*).
- 942 *nights of mirth/* “night [after] night [of celebrating] the Cold Meat Festival.” This festival (*Hán-thức*) was held in China from the 105th to the 107th day after the winter solstice in memory of Chieh Chih-t’ui (Giới Chi Thôi), and during that period food was supposed to be eaten cold.
- days of revelry/* “day [after] day [of celebrating] the Fifteenth Night of the First Lunar Month.” On that night (*Nguyễn-tiêu*), which marked the end of the New Year’s festivities, the Chinese lit lanterns and stayed up eating such snacks as small rice-flour dumplings: it was also known as the Lantern Festival.
- 945 *messages/* “reports [carried by] wild geese” (*tin nhạn*). Under the Han dynasty, Su Wu (Tô Vũ) was a Chinese envoy held prisoner by the Hsiung-nu. After some twenty years, as relations improved between the barbarians and the Court of China, Emperor Chao asked for Su’s release. The khan claimed that the captive had died. As a ruse to expose the khan’s lie, a new envoy told him that the emperor had shot a wild goose carrying a message written by Su and tied to its leg. The fictitious story so astonished the khan that he let Su go. This true incident has given rise in literature to the metaphor of the wild goose as a carrier of news and messages. See also note 1084.
- 954 *concubine/* “little star” (*tiểu-tinh*). In Poem 21 of *The Book of Odes*, a nobleman’s concubines lament their hard lot and compare themselves to “little stars” that must fade out before daybreak: unlike the first-rank wife, they may not stay all night in their lord’s bed but must leave him and hurry back to their apartments before sunrise.
- 955 *A swallow’s somehow turned an oriole/* This line and Line 959 are often interpreted as Nguyễn Du’s veiled attacks on Nguyễn Ánh’s disloyalty towards the Lê dynasty. The Nguyễn lords had been fighting against the Tây-sơn rebels in the South and against the Trịnh lords in the North in the name of a Lê restoration. Upon victory, however, Nguyễn Ánh grabbed the throne; the emperor’s vassal made himself the em-

peror, instead. The image of a swallow changed to an oriole was aptly vivid as an oracular indictment of the usurpation. Since birds are viewed traditionally as auspices (not only in East Asia, but throughout the world), the metamorphosis of one bird into another, indicating a profound upheaval in the natural order of things, could not bode well for the future of the Nguyễn dynasty.

- 959 *But now it seems the roles and ranks have changed/* See note 955.  
 962 *her devils, fiends, and demons all broke loose/* “[she was] roused by the three demons” (*nỗi tam-bành*). The phrase means “to fly into a rage” and usually refers to a woman. According to Taoist belief, each human being is possessed by three evil spirits or demons: P'eng Chū (Bành Cır), in the brain; P'eng Chih (Bành Chăt), in the forehead; and P'eng Chiao (Bành Kiều), in the belly. They urge him or her to rash or wicked deeds which they will gleefully report to the Jade Emperor.  
 997 *a rose/* “peach-red cheeks” (*má dào*). See note 6.  
 999 *frail reed/* “a willow [or] a ‘rush’” (*liễu-bồ*). See note 746.  
 1000 *the Ch'ien-t'ang/* a river flowing through the subprefecture of Ch'ien-t'ang in Chekiang.  
 1007 *force / your sterling virtue into games of love/* “force stone and bronze –08 [into] clouds and rains.” See notes 439 and 513.  
 1010 *your nuptial day/* “the day of the young, tender peach [tree]” (*ngày dào non*). In Poem 6, a wedding song, of *The Book of Odes*, the bride is compared to a young flowering peach tree: she will rightfully bring into the groom's home not only her beautiful looks but also her fertility, her ability to bear children even as the tree will bear peaches.  
 1045 *the yard's catalpa tree/* The yard is “Lai's yard” (*sân Lai*). According to Chinese legend, old Lai was such a filial son that, at seventy, he would still don funny clothes and dance in the yard to amuse his father and mother. As a metaphor, “Lai's yard” means one's home where one's parents still live.  
 1062 *Sô Khanh/* Ch'u Ch'ing in Chinese.  
 1063 *the charmer /* “Ch'ang-o's shadow” (*bóng nga*), a beautiful woman. See also notes 177 and 327.  
 1067 *She ought to rule the moon, among the clouds/* See note 327.  
 1084 *a messenger /* “a wild goose” (*hồng*). See note 945.  
 1090 *The twenty-first, hour of the dog/* The two Chinese characters 越 (hsü yüeh) can be broken down into others, 卍 一 日 戊 走 (*trien i jih hsü tsou*), which mean “flee on the twenty-first day, hour of the dog.” The “hour of the dog” is between 7 and 9 P.M.  
 1093 *the eastern wall/* See note 38.  
 1098 *these birds of mirth/* “swallows and orioles” (*yến-arth*). Cf. note 64.  
 1100 *knot grass/* To “knot grass” (*kết cỏ*) is to repay an act of kindness. On his deathbed, Wei Wu-tzu (Nguy Vũ Tú) of the kingdom of Tsin gave the order that his childless concubine should be killed and buried with

him. His son Wei K'o (Ngụy Khóa), disobeying the paternal injunction, let her live. Later, in a battle, he captured a Ch'in military commander, the famous Tu Hui (Đỗ Hối), thanks to the help of an old man who tripped up the Ch'in officer's horse with knots of grass. That night, the old man appeared to Wei K'o in a dream and said that he was the dead father of the concubine whose life had been spared.

- fetch jade rings/* To “fetch jade rings” (*ngâm vành* or, literally, to “carry rings in the mouth”) is another expression of gratitude. Yang Pao (Durong Bảo), at nine years of age, saved a wounded goldfinch from ants and nursed it until it grew strong enough to fly away. One night, the bird came back as a boy dressed in yellow and bearing as gifts four white jade rings (or badges of high office). Indeed, four generations of Yang's descendants rose to important posts in government.  
 1110 *Can any scheme on earth surpass swift flight?/* “Of all the thirty-six schemes, which scheme is better?” A Chinese adage says: “Of all thirty-six policies, the best scheme is to flee” (*Tam thập lục sách tẩu thị thường kẽ*).  
 1116 *the Maker/* “the child who creates [the world]” (*con tạo*). The Creator is here viewed as someone who is always up to mischief, who takes delight in hurting its own creatures. See also note 1129.  
 1129 *Heaven, wanton knave/* “the child who performs magic changes” (*hỏa-nhi*). See note 1116.  
 1148 *How can an eel mind muddying its head?/* *Thân lươn bao quản lầm đầu*. The line has acquired the status of a proverb, meaning that a poor, helpless person may have to endure humiliation and degradation in order to save himself or herself and survive.  
 1152 *Mã Kiêu/* Ma Ch'iao in Chinese.  
 1158 *Sô Khanh/* In popular parlance, his name has come to mean a Don Juan, a heartless, unscrupulous seducer.  
 1161 *that feint, the ‘sword in flight’/* As a tactic in swordsmanship, one pretends to flee and lets one's opponent come close enough, then one suddenly turns around and attacks him when he least expects it.  
 1162 *as thick as thieves/* “[like] a sorcerer and a medium” (*một cốt một đồng*).  
 1170 *his brazen face/* “a face [like a scarecrow's face made of] a spathe” (*mặt mó*).  
 1173 *tempted her, led her astray/* “enticed the wind [and] seduced the cloud” (*quyện gió rủ mây*).  
 1180 *seducing me, poor girl/* “enticing the swallow [and] seducing the oriole” (*quyện yến rủ anh*).  
 1194 *a mere rose/* “a rosy face” (*hồng-nhan*). See note 108.  
 1221 *A girl, wellborn and raised in her good home/* “[a girl coming from] a house with upper floors and private apartments for women” (*cá/các buồng khuê*).

- 1227 *the house of mirth/ "the green pavilion" (lầu xanh).*
- 1229 *bees and butterflies/ Cf. notes 38 and 1586.*
- 1231 *Birds flocked the branch, winds stirred the leaves/* This is a brief paraphrase of two lines from a poem which Hsüeh T'ao (Tiết Đào; 767?–831) wrote when she was quite young: "The branch greets birds from south and north. / The leaves sway back and forth with winds." To her father's dismay, the poem revealed not only literary precocity but also an early disposition toward promiscuous love. Indeed, she grew up to be the most famous poetess and courtesan under the T'ang.
- 1232 *some beau/* Sung Yü (Tống Ngọc), a Ch'u poet of the 3rd century B.C., a legendary figure reputed to be a womanizer. See also note 439.
- some spark/* Ch'ang-ch'ing (Trường Khanh), courtesy name of Ssuma Hsiang-ju (Tư Mã Tương Nhu; 179–117 B.C.), a Han writer. He acquired his fame as a Lothario partly from his seduction of the young widow Cho Wen-chün. See also note 475.
- 1239 *Over her flesh let them all rage and storm/* "Let them all make rains in Ch'u and clouds in Ch'in." See note 439.
- 1240 *love/* "spring" (xuân).
- 1253 *nine debts/* "the nine words [which indicate] high and deep [debts of gratitude]" (*chin chử cao-sáu*). They are the nine laborious tasks which parents have performed for their children's sake, birth, feeding, and upbringing among them, and which demand requital by acts of filial piety, according to Poem 202 in *The Book of Odes*.
- 1255 *whose sun/ was sinking day by day toward mulberry trees/* This comes from a Chinese metaphor: "The sun is falling toward mulberry trees and elms" (*Nhật lạc tang du*). It refers to the sunset of life, with particular application to one's parents.
- 1257 *Of sophoras their yard had two, still young/* "The yard of sophoras had two little ones still young." Under the Sung dynasty, Wang Hu (Vương Hựu), who had three sons, planted in his front yard three sophora trees in symbolic hope that they all would grow up to become ministers of state. Therefore, a "yard of sophoras" (*sân hòe*) means one's children, especially one's sons for whom one entertains great expectations. See also note 3238.
- 1259 *her vow of deathless troth/* "the vow for the three existences" (*lời nguyện-uớc ba sinh*). See note 257.
- 1261 *When he came home for her, the willow branch/ had been snatched off*
- 62 *and passed from hand to hand./* "When he came back he asked for the willow on Chang Terrace— / the spring branch had been broken off for men to pass from hand to hand." Under the T'ang, Miss Willow was a courtesan living in Ch'ang-an, the capital city, on a street named Chang Terrace (Chươn-dài). Han Hsiu (Hàn Hù), her lover, had to leave her and take up a far-away post. From there he wrote her a poem with these lines: "O Chang Terrace Willow, Chang Terrace Wil-

- low! / Are you still fresh and green as you once were?" When he came back, she was gone—she had been abducted by a Tartar general.
- 1270 *the Sorrow League/* See note 200.
- 1276 *Kỳ Tâm of the Thúc clan, a well-read breed/* According to the Chinese novel, he was "a student from the Shu (Thúc) clan, with Shou (Thú) as his name and Ch'i-hsin (Kỳ Tâm) as his courtesy name."
- 1277 *Hsi in Ch'ang/* the subprefecture of Wu-hsi in Ch'ang-chou, a prefecture of Kiangsu Province, roughly belonging to the area of Nanking.
- 1285 *Man and girl, girl and man in fevered clasp/* "Moon and flower, flower and moon [loving each other] passionately."
- 1287 *two kin spirits/* thanh-khí. See note 193.
- 1289 *They'd tryst and cling together night or day./* "They'd stay together, [exchanging] peaches by day and plums at night." To "[give each other] peaches by day and plums at night" (*sóng dào tỗi mận*) is to carry on an intense love affair. The phrase comes from a Chinese expression: "[One] gives a peach, [the other] requites with a plum" (*Dâu dào bão lý*). The ultimate source is Poem 64, a courtship song, in *The Book of Odes*. Cf. note 3220.
- 1290 *What had begun as lust soon turned to love./* "First it was still [an affair of] the moon and the wind, [but] later it became [a matter of] stone and bronze." The moon and the wind (*trăng-gió*) stand for transitory infatuation, and stone and bronze (*dà-vàng*) for an enduring relationship between lovers. See also notes 513, 2180, and 2593.
- 1292 *his father/* xuân-duyêng. See note 534.
- 1298 *chess/* encircling chess, the game of go.
- 1301 *tidal waves/* "waves that topple city walls" (*sóng khuynh-thành*). See notes 27 and 258.
- 1314 *a T'ang poem/* a lü-shih, or regulated verse, piece, composed in strict accordance with rules laid down under the T'ang dynasty (618–907), which is generally regarded as the Golden Age of Chinese poetry.
- 1317 *I owe you my reply./* "I ought to eke out [your] sable [with a dog's tail]." "Eke out sable" (*nồi diêu*) is an abbreviated translation of a Chinese proverbial phrase: to "eke out sable [tails] with dog tails" (*câu vỉ tục diêu*). In old China, high court officials wore sable tails as ornaments attached to their hats and caps. Toward the end of the Tsin dynasty, the usurper Chao Wang-lun (Triệu Vương Luân) kept so many sycophants at court that a joke gained currency: "If there is not enough sable, eke it out with dog tails" (*Điêu bắt túc câu vỉ tục*). As a literary expression, it is often used in a self-deprecatory way: to "eke out sable" is to reply to someone's poem with one not as good.
- 1319 *My heart still dwells beneath those golden clouds./* In old Chinese poetry, "golden clouds" suggest thoughts of home, with particular reference to a son or daughter far away from his or her parents.
- 1327 *No doubt, my lord keeps his own wedded wife/* "The lord of spring must

- already have [somebody] at some place." The expression "lord of spring" (*chúa xuân*) refers to a man who acts as the main protagonist in love or marriage. Cf. note 1946.
- 1330 *my heart has nursed for you a steadfast love* / "[for you] my heart has privately borne nothing but [a vow of love sworn in sight of] streams and hills." Cf. note 732.
- 1331 *plan to live as lifelong mates* / "plan a square and round life for a hundred years." "A hundred years" (*trăm năm*), the human span, also stands for long and happy life together as man and wife.
- 1335 *the house of mirth* / "Ping-k'ang" (Binh-khang), the red-light district of Ch'ang-an, the capital of T'ang China.
- 1339 *within the threshold of your home, a mistress is already wielding sway* / "within the cassia threshold of the moon palace there is already Ch'ang-o to hold sway." According to Chinese mythology, on the moon there are a cassia tree (*quē*) and a palace (*cung*) where lives the goddess Ch'ang-o (*Hàng-nga*) in the company of a magic toad (*thiēm*). Her abode is also known as the "toad palace" (*thiēm-cung* or *cung thiēm*), while "the toad under the cassia tree" (*thiēm quē*) refers to the dark spots humans see in the moon. In a bold wordplay, Nguyễn Du changes *thiēm* to *thém* ("threshold" or "doorstep") so that the latter word aptly balances the word *cung* in *thém quē cung trāng* ("the cassia threshold of the moon palace"). To compare young Thúc's deserted wife to Ch'ang-o is quietly ironic: the latter once got fed up with her husband, Hou Yi, stole the pill of immortality from him, and fled to the moon where she has been living without a man ever since.
- 1344 *to drain your fond affection from your spouse* / "to cause the sea of [your] love to rise sometimes and ebb sometimes."
- 1349 *the lady lords it over you* / "the power [of the one who runs things] inside [the home] is greater than [the power of the one who runs things] outside." A wife is known as the "minister of internal affairs" (*nội-tướng*).
- 1350 *I shall fall prey to her, your lioness*. / "A person [who is like] a rattan [or] a vine [will be] delivered before the jaws of a lioness." A "rattan or vine" (*dâng-la*) stands for a concubine in her position of dependence on the first-rank wife's goodwill and mercy. The image of the lioness (*sư-tử*), a jealous, shrewish wife, comes from "Ho-tung lioness" (*sư-tử Hả-dong*), an epithet jokingly coined by the Sung writer Su Shih (Tô Thúc) to describe a friend's wife who vocally objected to her husband's parties with singing girls.
- 1352 *her vinegar* / "[her] sour vinegar" (*giảm chua*). The phrase refers specifically to a first-rank wife's bitter resentment of a concubine: the T'ang empress Wu, jealous of a palace lady, had her killed and pickled in vinegar.
- hell's own fire* / "hot fire" (*lửa nóng*). The phrase describes a brothel as

- a hellish place for women who have to live there and work as prostitutes.
- 1353 *your father* / "the house [where grows] a pine" (*nhà thông*). The word *thông* is used loosely here for the cedrela. See note 534.
- 1355 *the rose picked off a wall* / "the willow [that grows along] a path [or] the flower [that blooms on] a wall" (*liễu ngô hoa tường*). The phrase refers to a prostitute or a woman of easy virtue.
- 1356 *He'll send the harlot back to harlotdom*. / "[Someone who came from] a green pavilion [he will] cast out [and put back among] those who haunt a green pavilion."
- 1363 *Wu or Laos* / Wu (*Ngô*) is a mild pejorative applied by the Vietnamese to China and the Chinese. It dates from the hated Ming occupation of the country in the early part of the 15th century: the founder of the Ming dynasty had started his political career as a bandit in Wu, an area roughly corresponding to Kiangsu Province. To the Vietnamese Laos (*Lào*) was a country beyond rugged mountains and difficult of access. As a proverbial expression, "Wu and Laos" (*Ngô-Lào*) means far-away places to which one would not normally think of going.
- 1366 *I've sworn my troth—I'll brave the winds and waves!* / "Since [I've] already decided [to etch my troth in] stone and bronze [*dá-vàng*], [I'll] brave even the winds and the waves." See note 513.
- 1370 *the moon* / "the hare." See note 79.
- 1381 *lovers joined their lives beneath one roof* / "the bamboo and the plum tree lived together in one home." See notes 708 and 746.
- 1388 *the father* / *xuân-dương*. See note 534.
- 1392 *in her old whorehouse he'd put back the whore* / "he ordered that [the one with] powdered cheeks go back to the green pavilion."
- 1397 *my hand has dipped in indigo* / Indigo (*chàm*), from the indigo plant, is technically known as a "vat" dye, that is, a fast dye which does not dissolve in water and which is not easy to wash or scrub away. Hence, the proverbial phrase "the hand has dipped in indigo" (*tay dâ nhúng chàm*) means that one has made a mistake that is difficult or impossible to correct. For another proverbial use of indigo, see note 2326.
- 1414 *boors* / "black little boys" (*con den*). See note 839.
- 1426 *shackles, cuffs, and cangue* / "the three wooden [instruments of physical restraint]" (*ba cây*). This is a translation of the Chinese expression *tam-mộc*.
- 1448 *this harlot* / "[someone who leads the life of] the moon and flowers" (*trăng-hoa*). The phrase refers to the pursuit of pleasure and promiscuous sex, as contrasted with faithful love based on marriage: the moon, which waxes and wanes, and flowers, which bloom and fade, symbolize inconstancy. See also notes 1290 and 1538.
- 1455 *the height of T'ang* / High T'ang (*Thịnh-Dương*). Usually thought to have lasted from 713 to 765, the period spanned the reign of Emperor

- Hsüan-tsung and saw the flowering of great poets like Li Po and Tu Fu.
- 1458 *Chou and Ch'en*] In ancient China, Chou (*Châu*) and Ch'en (*Trân*) were the only clans making up a certain village, and they intermarried. The phrase “Chou and Ch'en” (*Châu-Trân*) has come to mean marriage as a bond linking two families.
- 1466 *the bridal carriage*] “the palanquin [decorated with] flowers” (*kiệu hoa*).
- 1477 *this frail girl found her support in you*] “[someone with] the lot of a rush fulfilled the duty of a submissive [wife].” See note 505.
- 1480 *With your new bride, you've cooled toward your old mate.*] “[You've grown] intense in [your] love for a clinging vine [and] cool in [your] love for [someone you married when you had only] wine dregs and rice bran.” In Chinese, *cát* is *Pueraria thunbergiana*, a creeper that yields edible beans and fibers for making cloth, and *tùy* is a climbing vine. Together, they mean “concubines,” women who are like “clinging vines” in that they are dependent on both the husband and the first-rank wife. “Wine dregs and rice bran” (*teo-khang*) refers to the woman a man wedded when he was still poor, i.e., the first-rank wife.
- 1497 *Father*] *xuān-duông*. See note 534.
- 1500 *their sweet love nest*] “[their] spring mansion” (*xuân-dinh*).  
*Mount Kao-t'ing*] a mountain in Chekiang, the site of a stage-post celebrated in old Chinese poetry as a parting place.
- 1501 *Ch'in*] a river flowing through Shensi, also celebrated in literature as a place for farewells.
- 1502 *along the bank, some willows waved goodbye*] “dangling here and there on the bank of willow trees were some Yang Pass branches.” Yang Pass (*Duong-quan*), in Kansu Province, has become associated with parting through a farewell quatrain by the T'ang poet Wang Wei (701–61), in which the last line reads: “Beyong Yang Pass and going west, there won't be any old friend” (*Tây xuất Dương quan vô cõi nhân*). It was a custom in China to break off a willow branch and give it to a friend about to leave on a long journey. For a discussion of the willow as an image of parting, read Chapter 8 (pp. 95–103) in Hans H. Frankel's *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976).
- 1506 *peace must reign at home to reign abroad*] “[you must] see to it that inside [your home] it stays nice and warm before [you can have peace and] quiet outside.” “Inside” alludes to the first-rank wife and “outside” to the concubine.
- 1507 *One sees a needle's eye if no red scarf*.) “It's [more] easy to remain blind to a scarlet breastcloth [than] to a needle's eye.” A proverb says: “One may remain blind to a scarlet breastcloth, but it's hard to remain blind to a needle's eye” (*Lòa được yểm thảm, khó lòa tròn kim*). An absent-minded person may fail to see the most obvious thing, but

- someone who pays attention will notice the smallest detail. In the Chinese novel, to indicate that it is impossible to keep people in the dark about what is going on, the following proverb is quoted by Ts'ui-ch'iao: “When a man walks grass is stirred, and when a bird flies feathers drop” (*Nhân hành thảo động, diều phi mao lạc*).
- 1508 *Blindfolded, who will try to catch a bird?*] To “cover one's eyes and try to catch a bird” (*bịt mắt bắt chim*) is to engage in wishful thinking and attempt the impossible.
- 1520 *autumn was tinging maple woods with gloom*] “maple woods were already tinged with hues [associated with] passes and mountains [and parting].” Passes and mountains (*quan-san*) suggest long, difficult journeys and therefore stir up sad feelings about parting from friends and loved ones.
- 1529 *Huan*] Huan in Chinese. In the Chinese novel, the relationship between Miss Huan and young Shu is described as follows: “His wife was Miss Huan, . . . beautiful and bright. The only trouble with her was her fierce jealousy, but then she knew how to keep up a dignified front. She was also quite headstrong and wanted to have her way in everything. Since she would share her love for someone with no one else, she would not have the one she loved share his love with anyone else. Not only was young Shu by far her inferior in talent and wit, but she arranged the household in such an orderly fashion that he came to lose all freedom. Though outwardly he seemed happy enough, deep in his heart he missed something.”
- 1530 *the Civil Office Board*] the ministry handling civil personnel in old China. Its head was sometimes the equivalent of a prime minister.
- 1531 *On happy winds of chance Thúc had met her*] “Bound by fate for [the palace of] T'eng, [he] had been blown in the right direction by the wind.” According to tradition, Wang Po (Vương Bột, ca. 650–76) was on his way to visit his father, a magistrate in Chiao-chi (North Vietnam, then under Chinese rule). As he was sailing down the Yangtze, a favorable wind brought his boat to Hsin-chien in Kiangsi Province, just in time for a banquet held by Prince T'eng, Emperor T'ang Kao-tsu's youngest son, at his newly built palace there. To celebrate the palace, Wang wrote a preface in parallel prose and an eight-line poem: the preface caused a sensation and made Wang famous overnight. Later writers often alluded to this incident as a symbol of good luck leading to success, though Wang's life as a whole was marked by misfortune and failure: in fact, he drowned at sea in his twenties. For young Scholar Thúc, to marry into the family of a minister of state was to reach Prince T'eng's palace at the right moment for a feast: it was a stroke of luck as good as, or even better than, literary success, since most scholars viewed the latter only as an avenue to membership in the ruling class with all its perquisites and privileges. This is an instance of

- Nguyễn Du's felicitous use of a cliché which, in an unconventional context, takes on an unexpected edge of sarcasm and a renewed vitality.
- 1538 *the knave whose fickle heart had roamed*/ "the faithless person who had shown a heart [given to affairs of] the moon and flowers." See also note 1448.
- 1548 *the ant's inside the cup—where can it crawl?*/ "The ant is crawling on the rim of the cup" (*Kiên bò miệng chén*) is a proverbial expression about someone in perilous circumstances from which there is no escape.
- 1552 *the traitor*/ "the man who sells his [old] boat [before he has] made a visit [to buy] planks [for a new one]." To "sell one's boat before one has shopped for planks" (*chưa thâm ván dã bán thuyền*) is to be fickle in one's affections and wavering in one's loyalties, too ready to discard things and people that no longer serve one's purpose.
- 1577 *I've kept my mouth shut tight*/ To "stop tightly the bottle's mouth" (*bưng kín miệng bình*) is to keep mum, keep a secret to oneself. There is a similar expression in Chinese to "stop one's mouth like a bottle" (*thì khâu như bình*).
- 1578 *Why should I squeal when no one's sticking me?*/ The line includes a proverb: "Who tortures you that you should confess?" (*Ai kháo mà xưng?*). Only a fool would volunteer information against himself, would condemn himself out of his own mouth.
- 1580 *to pull a vine and shake the woods*/ *rút dây động rừng*. The expression means "to do something that will provoke grave repercussions, start a chain of events with a single act."
- 1586 *they've peddled tales of your so-called amours*/ "they've made up all sorts of stories about butterflies and bees". "Butterflies and bees" (*bướm-ong*) are philanderers and womanizers. Cf. notes 38 and 1229.
- 1593 *perch and fish-cress*/ "the native delights, *Brasenia purpurea* and perch." On an autumn day, Chang Han (Trương Hán), an official in the capital under the Tsin, missed the taste of *Brasenia purpurea* (*thuận*, an edible waterplant) and perch (*lư*, similar to *ic*, a fish found in Vietnam), common dishes of his native countryside; thereupon, he resigned and went back to his village. The story has become a stereotype for homesickness.
- 1598 *the lady guessed his mind and offhand said: . . .*/ In the Chinese novel, it was young Shu himself who suggested to his wife that he should go back to Lin-tzu and visit his father whom he had not seen for more than a year.
- 1599 *those white clouds*/ Under the T'ang, Ti Jen-chieh (Địch Nhân Kiết), who became a trusted minister to Empress Wu, was celebrated as a filial son. One day, standing on Mount T'ai-hang, he saw a mass of

white clouds in the distance. He said to those who were with him: "My parents' home stands under those white clouds."

- 1600 *care for your old sire*/ "[perform your duties] morn and eve" (*thân-hôn*). See note 918.
- 1607 *her mother*/ *nha huyên*. See note 224.
- 1609 *A jealous tantrum's like an itch*/ The proverbial phrase "a mangy itch and a jealous rage" (*ngứa ghẻ hờn ghen*) associates two urges that cannot be easily satisfied but, instead, get worse and worse.
- 1626 *Ch'i*/ "the port of Ch'i" (*bến Tề*). Lin-tzu used to be the capital of the ancient state of Ch'i.
- 1629 *Their sun is setting, hanging at head's height*/ "Sunlight has sunk toward the mulberry trees and reached head's height." See note 1253–54.
- 1633 *a clinging ivy*/ "a yam bean vine [or] a morning glory vine" (*sắn-bìm*). See notes 902, 1350, and 1480.
- 1636 *Ch'ang-o*/ See note 1340.  
*her hall*/ *cung Quảng[-hàn]*, the "Palace of Vast [Cold]."
- 1638 *a crescent moon, three stars*/ This line may suggest that Kiều was thinking of young Thúc. The crescent moon (*nửa vành trăng khuyaết*) and the three stars (*ba sao*) seem to resemble the character 心 (*Tâm*; in Chinese, *Hsin*), a part of Thúc's given name.
- 1674 *her tablet*/ *bài vi*, the memorial tablet bearing the name of the deceased.
- 1679 *we two*/ "the plum tree and the bamboo" (*mai-trúc*). See note 708.
- 1685 *the Three Isles*/ *tam-dao*. According to Taoist mythology, there are three fairy islands in the Eastern sea, the most famous of which is P'eng-lai (*Bồng-lai*).  
*the Nine Springs*/ *cửu-tuyễn*. See notes 94, 710, 734, and 3000.
- 1715 *with a jolt, she wakened from her drowse*/ "the soul [that visited a grove of] plum trees suddenly woke up from the yellow millet [dream]." The line contains two allusions about sleep and dreaming. The first has to do with Chao Shih-hsiung (Triệu Sư Hùng), who, under the Sui dynasty, happened to be at sunset in a grove of plum trees on Mount Lo-fu (La-phù) in Kwangtung, a mountain reputed to be the abode of gods and spirits. He met a gorgeous woman and took her to the wine shop where they drank together. He got drunk and lost consciousness. When he woke up next morning, he found himself under a flowering plum tree. The second allusion is to a T'ang parable. In an inn, a poor student met a Taoist priest and was given a magic pillow on which he went to sleep. He dreamed he married a beautiful girl and rose to high office to live happily for fifty years. On waking up, he found that the innkeeper had not yet finished cooking a pot of yellow millet.
- 1724 *on a couch a lady sat enthroned*/ "a lady sat on a bed [decorated with]

- seven gems." According to Chinese tradition, the "seven gems" (*thất bđo*) are coral, amber, agate, nacre, pearl, gold or silver, and crystal. See also note 2210.
- 1731 *A graveyard cat! A hen that prowls the fields!*/ The phrase "graveyard cats and field chickens" (*mèo mả gà đồng*) refers either to vagrants who make a dishonest living or to men and women of loose morals who consort with one another outside marriage.
- 1752 *a reed/ "a willow [or] a rush" (liễu-bđô).* See note 746.
- 1755 *walls have ears and eyes/ "[there are] ears on walls [even as there are] chinks in wattles" (tai vách mạch đủng).* Another form of the same proverb is "Wattles have chinks, walls have ears" (*Đứng có mạch, vách có tai*).
- 1758 *flies and ants/ "bees and ants" (con ong cái kiền).* The phrase refers to the "little people," the poor, helpless victims of those in power.
- 1778 *the lute/ "bamboo and silk" (trúc-tơ).*
- 1785 *to meet her Lin-tzu spouse again/ "[for] the water and the water fern to meet again."*
- 1820 *her heart a raveled knot of silken threads/ "the silkworm's bowels in many sections like tangled threads."*
- 1832 *I think of my lost mother and still grieve./ "I think in my mind [as one who] climbs the bare hill [and] it hurts my heart till the end of the heavens."* One who "climbs the bare hill" (*trắc-dì*) is one who loves his or her mother; the image comes from two lines in *The Book of Odes*: "I climb this bare hill / [and] yearn for my mother" (*Trắc bì dì hể, / chiêm vọng mẫu hế*).
- 1846 *he took the proffered cup and quaffed the gall/ "holding a soapberry in his mouth, he had to drain the proffered cup right away."* The soapberry (*bđò-hòn*), which contains saponin, tastes bitter and acrid. As a proverbial phrase, to "hold a soapberry in one's mouth and make believe it tastes sweet" (*ngâm bđò-hòn làm ngọt*) is to feel deep bitterness while putting on a happy appearance.
- 1858 *to wipe them off/ "to wipe off drops from the Hsiang."* See note 238.
- 1865 *The waterclock now marked the night's third watch/ "Drops from the dragon already marked the third watch."* A waterclock (or clepsydra) had often the shape of a dragon and was called a "bronze dragon" (*đồng-long*).
- 1879 *So gently it holds us, her iron hand!*/ "[Her hand can be] as light as cork [or] as heavy as lead" (*nhet nhu bắc nặng nhu chi*).
- 1902 *she could have graced a palace cast in gold/ As a boy, the Han emperor Wu (Hán Vũ-dê) admired a girl named A-chiao (A-kiều) so much that he said, "If I could get her, I would build a golden house to keep her in."* When he grew up to rule China, she became one of his consorts.
- 1910 *the Void's great gate/ "the gate of the Void" (cửa không), i.e., a Buddhist shrine or temple.*

- 1913 *Kuan-yin/ the Buddhist goddess of mercy, "listener to the world's cries."*
- 1914 *everblooming lotus/ "four-season flowers" (hoa bốn mùa).* This is a reference to the lotus throne of a Buddha.
- tall bo tree/ "a tree that is a hundred feet tall" (cây tràm thưức).* The Buddha attained enlightenment (*bodhi*) under a bo (or bodhi) tree or pipal (*cây bồ-đề*).
- 1920 *three vows/ tam-qui (Trisarana or "three surrenders").* Upon becoming a monk or nun, a Buddhist pledges surrender (*qui*) to the Three Treasures (*tam-bđo* or *Triratna*): surrender to the Buddha (*Phật*) as the master, to the Dharma (*Pháp*) or Law as medicine, and to the Sangha (*Tăng*) or the religious community as friends.
- five commands/ ngũ-giới (panca veramani).* Binding on Buddhist laity, male and female, as well as on monks and nuns, the five commandments are against killing, stealing, lechery, lying, and drinking alcohol.
- 1922 *Pure Spring/ Trắc Tuyễn (in Chinese, Cho-ch'üan), literally, "cleansed spring."*
- 1926 *the Purple Grove/ rừng tía.* According to Buddhist tradition, Kuan-yin stays at the Purple Bamboo Grove (*Tử-trúc-lâm*).
- red dust/ bụi hồng,* a metaphor for the world of mundane concerns.
- 1931 *Kuan-yin's willow branch/ "the willow branch" (cành dương).* Kuan-yin is often represented with a willow branch in her hand, sprinkling drops of mercy on a suffering world.
- 1946 *[If] let you singly shoulder all our woes/ "the lord of spring let the flower [take] the punishment all alone."* About the "lord of spring" (*chúa xuân*), see note 1327.
- 1955 *I break my vow/ "I [let] stone break and bronze fade."* See also notes 422, 513, and 1290.
- 1957 *a small, frail skiff/ "a cypress boat" (chiếc bách).* This metaphor for a woman as a helpless creature buffeted by the world can be traced back to Poem 26 of *The Book of Odes*.
- 1961 *a drop of rain/ "a drop from a downpour" (một giọt mưa dào).* See note 619.
- 1971 *Try for your freedom—run or fly away!/ In the Chinese novel, young Shu tells Ts'ui-ch'iao: "Now I realize that from this garden going west there are many Buddhist convents. So gather a few personal belongings and run away to take refuge somewhere for a while and wait till things have calmed down: then, you could flee farther yet."* After she had followed his advice and left, his wife wanted to pursue the fugitive, but he dissuaded her.
- 1976 *the thread of silk/ tơ.* See note 2242.
- 1988 *Lan-t'ing engravings/ engravings of calligraphy from *Lan-t'ing-hsü* (*Lan-dinh-t'y*), a piece of prose written by Wang Hsi-chih (Wróng Hy*

- Chi; 321–79): its literary merit is overshadowed by its worth and fame as a calligraphic masterpiece. In the Chinese novel, Miss Huan praises Ts'ui-ch'iao's brush strokes by comparing them to "Yen's sinews and Liu's bones" (*Nhan cân Liêu cốt*), quoting a phrase coined by the Sung scholar-statesman Fan Chung-yen (Phạm Trọng Yêm). Under the T'ang dynasty, both Yen Chen-ch'ing (Nhan Chân Khanh) and Liu Kung-ch'üan (Liêu Công Quyên) were celebrated as calligraphers.
- 1991 *Dhyana* / thiền, having to do with meditation or contemplation and therefore with Buddhism in general, and especially the Ch'an (meditative, intuitionist) school founded in China by Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth patriarch.
- 2036 *Retreat of Blessed Peace* / "the temple that calls [people] to retreat [from] the world" (*Chiêu Ân Am*).
- 2040 *Giác Duyên* / Chüeh-yüan in Chinese.
- 2081 *Bac* / Po in Chinese.
- 2094 *to force a man on her* / "to force the tie between Chou and Ch'en." See note 1458.
- 2096 *and all around you've spread a nasty name* / "moreover, [you've] incurred a bad, a [no] good reputation near and far." According to a proverb, "good news spreads near, and bad news spreads far" (*tiếng lành đồn gần, tiếng dữ đồn xa*).
- 2103 *Bac Hạnh* / Po Hsing in Chinese.
- 2105 *T'ai* / a county in Chekiang Province.
- 2119 *wed and serve a man* / "plan [to perform] the duty of submission [to one's] husband." See note 505.
- 2121 *I have bought / a tiger in a poke* / "[I have dealt with people who] sell tigers and trade in wolves" (*bán hùm buôn sói*).
- 2132 *all the gods of hearth and home* / "The City Guardian Spirit [*Thành-hoàng*] and the Kitchen God [*Thò-công*]."
- 2144 *Bac was carting his false face away* / "Bac carried [his] false face looking for a way to get far [from there]." There is a pun on the man's surname: *bac* can also mean "false," "disloyal," "treacherous" (see also note 753).
- 2151 *the fate of a peach blossom* / *sở hoa đào*. A woman born under the sign of the peach blossom is doomed to become a prostitute.
- 2157 *Great Potter's Wheel* / *Hồng-quân*, the Creator as shaper of human destinies. See also notes 343, 412 and 3072.
- womanhood* / "people who wear red skirts" (*khách hồng-quân*). See note 35.
- 2164 *I'll brazen out the death of my spring days* / "[I'll] sacrifice [my] powdered face and get [my] green days over with."
- 2167 *A tiger's beard, a swallow's jaw, and brows / as thick as silkworms* / This is the physiognomy of a military hero, similar to that of the famous Han commander Pan Ch'ao (Ban Siêu), who had a jaw like a swallow's

- beak and a neck like a tiger's (*yển hàm hổ cảnh*).
- he stood broad and tall* / "[his] shoulders were five inches broad [and his] body was ten feet tall."
- 2171 *Between the earth and heaven he lived free* / "Carrying heaven on [his] head and trampling the earth, [he] lived in the world." To "carry heaven over head and trample the earth underfoot" (*dội trời dập đất*) is to lead a proudly independent life, acknowledging nobody's authority.
- 2172 *Tù Hái ... Yüeh-tung* / Tù Hái is Hsü Hai in Chinese, and Yüeh-tung is Kwangtung, the area "east of the Yüeh river." Hsü Hai's portrait in the Chinese novel is as follows: "At that time there was a bravo whose name was Hai, whose clan name was Hsü, and whose courtesy name was Ming-shan. A native of Yüeh, he had a generous nature, made light of wealth, and did not take seriously the married state. He boasted a mastery of all martial arts and was renowned as a hero throughout the world. At first he had pursued a scholar's career, but after several failures at the examinations, he turned to trade and grew rich, with more money than he could spend. But he enjoyed associating with those adventurous souls who roamed the streams and lakes."
- 2173 *Plying his oar, he roved the streams and lakes / with sword and lute upon his shoulders slung* / "[On] rivers and lakes [he] was used to the pleasure of roaming at large, / [carrying] a sword and a lute as half a load [on each shoulder] and [plying] one oar [through] hills and streams." The second line of the six-eight couplet is a highly condensed paraphrase of two lines of verse by the T'ang rebel Huang Ch'ao (Hoàng Sáo): "[Carrying] a bow and a sword on half [of the two] shoulders, [I] roam freely under heaven. / [Plying] one oar [through] rivers and mountains, [I] go to the ends of the earth" (*Bản kiên cung kiếm bắng thiên tung, Nhứt trao giang sơn tận địa huy*). On Huang Ch'ao, see note 2496.
- 2179 *Two kindred souls have joined* / "The heart and the bosom have met" (*Tâm phúc tương cờ*).
- 2180 *those giddy fools who play at love* / "people who are [as] fickle [as] the moon and the wind." See also notes 1290 and 2593.
- 2181 *your charms* / "[your] peach-red cheeks" (*má đào*).
- 2182 *none's won favor yet in your clear eyes* / This is an allusion to Yüan Chi (Nguyễn Tích; 210–63), the most eccentric member of the group called the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*Trúc Lâm Thất Hiển*). He refused to see people he disliked, showing them only the whites of his eyes, and reserved his "clear eyes" (*thanh-nhẫn* or *mắt xanh*) for the chosen few.
- 2184 *caged birds or fish in pots* / "Fish in pots and birds in cages" (*cá chậu chim lồng*) are common men who live constrained lives and lack the freedom of those who "carry heaven overhead and trample the earth underfoot." See note 2171.

2192 *They call to mind the tale of Prince P'ing-yüan.*] In a poem entitled "The Youth of Han-tan: A Song," the T'ang poet Kao Shih (Cao Thích; 702?–65) wrote: "Where can he entrust his heart and soul? / He is put in mind of Prince P'ing-yüan" (*Vị tri can dám huống thùy thi / Linh nhân khuất ước Bình nguyên quân*). This is an allusion to an important event in the prince's life which showed how difficult it is to choose somebody one can trust. He was the younger brother of the king of Chao (Triệu). When Han-tan (Hàn-dam), the capital, was besieged by troops from Ch'in (Tần), the prince was charged with leading a mission to the state of Ch'u (Số) and seeking military assistance there. One more man was needed to complete the delegation, but the prince could not find a suitable person among the thousands of guests and retainers who were living at his home. Finally, one of them, Mao Sui (Mao Toại), who seemed a perfect nonentity, volunteered to go. In desperation, the prince took him along. As it turned out, the unassuming man proved such a good diplomat that the king of Ch'u was persuaded to send relief troops and break the Ch'in siege of the Chao capital.

2196 *Chin-yang shall see a dragon in the clouds.*] Under the Sui dynasty, Li Yuan, who was commandant at Chin-yang in T'ai-yüan, had a four-year-old son, Li Shih-min, for whom physiognomists predicted an imperial career of extraordinary brilliance. Indeed, the boy grew up to rebel against the Sui and succeeded in installing his father on the throne as the founder of the T'ang dynasty. He himself became emperor as T'ang T'ai-tsung. The prophecy about the Li family's imperial future was summed up in a saying: "A dragon is flying over Chin-yang" (*Long phi Tân dương*).

2204 *we'll sit together when I sit on high.*] "even [after I have won] ten thousand bushels [of rice] and a thousand carriages, [we shall] stay together."

2210 *a sumptuous bed and curtains decked with gods.*] "a bed [encrusted with] seven gems [and] curtains [decorated with] eight immortals." According to Taoist lore, the "eight immortals" (*bát-tiên*) are: 1) Chung-li Ch'üan (Chung Ly Quyền), who is represented holding his feather fan or a peach of immortality; 2) Lü Tung-pin (Lữ Động Tân), who is always represented with his magic saber and holds in one hand his fly-whisk; 3) Chang Kuo Lao (Trương Quá Lão), who is usually seen mounted on his white mule and carrying a phoenix feather or a peach of immortality; 4) Li T'ieh-kuai (Lý Thiệt Quái), always depicted with his crutch and his gourd of magic medicines; 5) Lan Ts'ai-ho (Lam Thái Hòa), a hermaphrodite who plays a flute or a pair of cymbals; 6) Ts'ao Kuo-chiu (Tào Quắc Cửu), who was connected with the Sung emperors and is shown with the tablet of admission to Court in his hand; 7) Ho Hsien Ku (Hà Tiên Cô), a goddess holding in her

hand a lotus blossom or a peach of immortality; and 8) Han Hsiang Tzü (Hàn Tương Tử), who is represented with a bunch of flowers or a basket of peaches of immortality. About the "seven gems" (*thất-bđo*), see note 1724.

2212 *found a dragon for her mount.*] "had a beautiful marriage riding a dragon." To "ride a dragon" (*cõi rồng* or *thùa-long*) is to wed a worthy husband.

2217 *A woman's place is near her man.*] "A woman's lot (is summed up in) the word follow." *Tòng* is to "follow or submit to (one's husband)", according to Confucian ethics. Cf. notes 505 and 2329.

2230 *the eagle.*] "the roc" (*băng*), the mythical bird that symbolizes manly ambition.

2235 *the elms back home.*] "the catalpas and the elms" (*tù-phản*), trees that stand for one's native place.

2236 *clouds.*] "Ch'in clouds." A line of verse by the T'ang writer Han Yü (Hàn Dü) reads: "I see clouds straddling the Ch'in mountain range and know not where my home is" (*Vân hoành Tân lĩnh gia hà tại*).

2237 *her old parents.*] "the wizened day lily and the aging cedrela" (*huyền cỗi xuân già*). See notes 224 and 534.

2242 *cut from her mind, it clung on to her heart.*] "though the lotus stem was cut off from [her] mind, [her] heart was still entangled in the silk thread." The association of both the lotus and silk with love is based on two puns that go back to old Chinese poetry. The Chinese word *lien* ("lotus"; *liên* in Sino-Vietnamese) sounds like *lien* ("to love, feel attached to someone"; *liên* in Sino-Vietnamese). The lotus stem (*ngó*) also happens to have a symbolically relevant attribute: when it gets broken in half, the two sections often remain loosely connected by very thin fibers or filaments. *Ssu* ("raw silk," "silk thread"; *tô* in Sino-Vietnamese and *to* in the vernacular) is a homonym of *ssu* ("to think of, long for someone absent"; *tu* in Sino-Vietnamese).

2247 *the eagle.*] "the wild goose" (*hổng*). Like the mythical roc (*băng*), the high-flying goose symbolizes a man who wants to rise or has risen above the vulgar throng by his own efforts. For other uses of the wild goose in metaphor, see notes 945 and 2886.

2325 *face soaked with sweat / like indigo.*] "the face [seeming] as if indigo –26 [had been] poured [on it]."

*frame shaking like a leaf.*] "the body looking like a shaking wagtail." *Giè* is a vague term referring to various birds, including snipes and jays, which often wag their tails. Some editors prefer to emend the word to *cây* ("dog"), having in mind the proverbial expression "to shake like a [wet] dog warming itself [by the fire]" (*run nhu cây sấy*).

2329 *A morning star weds not an evening star.*] "[As] Shen [with regard to] Shang, [I could] not fulfill [towards you those duties embodied in] the word follow." *Shen* (*Sâm*, a constellation which includes some stars in

- Orion) and Shang (*Thượng* or Lucifer, a morning star) never see each other: they stand for lovers separated by insurmountable obstacles or for brothers at odds with each other. About "the word *follow*," see notes 505 and 2217.
- 2334 *the thief has met the shrewd old gal*/ A proverb: "The thief meets the old woman" (*kẻ cắp gặp bà già*). It means that someone meets his or her match, as in such English equivalents as "It takes a thief to catch a thief."
- 2348 *no gold can match the washerwoman's heart*/ When he was still a poor, hungry fisherman, Han Hsin (Hàn Tin) was befriended by an old washerwoman who gave him a bowl of rice. Later, thanks to his military genius, he helped Liu Pang (Lưu Bang) triumph over Hsiang Yü (Hàng Vũ) and mount the throne in 206 B.C. as Emperor Kao-tsü, founder of the Han dynasty. Now the most prestigious general in the empire, Han Hsin repaid the washerwoman's bowl of rice with gold. That grateful man, however, fell victim to political ingratitude: suspected of actual or potential treason, he was degraded and put to death by the emperor.
- 2378 *She gave an order setting free Miss Hoạn, / who gratefully fell prostrate on the ground.*/ In the Chinese novel, Ts'ui-ch'iao also spared Miss Huan's life, but she made her pay dearly for it: she had her stripped stark naked, hung by the hair to a beam, and then whipped with four horsewhips from four different directions at the same time until "not a single piece of her skin remained whole." Each of those condemned to death was executed in a special fashion, with all the gruesome details carefully and gleefully described.
- 2401 *Two wanderers will part ways*/ "The water fern and the cloud, after getting together, will part."
- 2406 *Tam Hop*/ San-ho in Chinese.
- 2422 *this frail reed*/ "a little person [like] a rush [or] a willow". See note 746.
- 2439 *bamboos split fast; tiles slip, soon fall apart*/ "bamboos split, tiles fall apart" (*trúc chẽ ngói tan*). The phrase describes a rout before a lightning attack: bamboos, once slit, will split all by themselves, and loose tiles will cause others to slip, thus toppling the whole roof.
- 2446 *those racks for coats, those sacks for rice*/ *giá áo sái corn*. "Racks for coats and sacks for rice" (from the Chinese *yí jià phàn nang*) are useless men only concerned with their material needs and wants.
- 2452 *Hồ Tôn Hiền*/ Hu Tsung-hsien in Chinese. In the Chinese novel, his role looms less large because he has many other people helping him.
- 2459 *two waiting maids*/ In the Chinese novel, they are clearly identified as spies and agents planted beside Ts'ui-ch'iao to induce a surrender mood in her, playing on her homesickness, her vanity, and her desire for wealth and rank.
- 2462 *Lord Từ himself felt gnawing doubts and thought, ...*/ In the Chinese

- novel, Hsü Hai is portrayed realistically and, through his way of thinking and reasoning, made to look like a politician carefully weighing gains and losses, pros and cons, and not like an epic hero who wants to be his own master.
- 2475 *"A ferry that floats on water," she now thought ...*/ The thoughts expressed in this interior monologue correspond, in the Chinese novel, to bits of advice given to Ts'ui-ch'iao by the two waiting maids.
- 2486 *a skiff*/ "a cypress boat" (*chiếc bách*). See note 1957.
- 2494 *the Wayward Stream*/ So called because it has often shifted its course, the Wayward (Wu-ting) River is a tributary of the Yellow River, flowing from Suiyuan in Inner Mongolia to Shensi. It was the site of many bloody battles between the Chinese and the Tartars. Ch'en T'ao (Trần Dao), a T'ang poet of the ninth century, wrote this quatrain entitled "Lung-hsi Song": "They pledged their lives to sweep the Huns away. / Five thousand braves in furs bit Tartar dust. / Pity their bones which rim the Wayward Stream. / As men, they haunt their women's dreams in spring."
- 2496 *Huang Ch'ao*/ An unsuccessful scholar, he led his fellow rebels to capture Ch'ang-an, the capital, in 881 and proclaimed himself emperor, but he was soon defeated and slain in 884. His revolt dealt the T'ang dynasty a blow from which it was not to recover. See also note 2173–74.
- 2581 *We're destined for each other*/ "[You and I are probably bound together by a troth sworn with] incense and fire [which will be kept in the course of] three existences" (*huynh-lí-a ba sinh*). See note 257.
- 2582 *Let me restring your lute and make it whole.*/ "[I] beg to splice the [broken] strings [of the lute with] phoenix [glue] and make them whole again for someone." See note 726.
- 2586 *My heartstrings broke just like Hsiao-lin's lute strings.*/ Hsiao-lin, concubine of the king of Ch'i, was forced to marry a warlord upon the collapse of that state. As she was playing the lute one day, its strings broke. She was moved to compose a poem with the following lines: "You want to know how my poor heartstrings snapped? / Look at the strings of the lute on my knees" (*Dục trĩ tâm đoạn tuyệt. / Ưng khán tát thương huyền*).
- 2593 *to toy with love*/ "[to engage in] a play of the moon and the wind." See note 1290.
- 2638 *the fragrant gem*/ "jade" (*ngọc*) and "fragrance" (*huong*).
- 2645 *But dawn/succeeds the dark*/ "When yin reaches its extreme, yang –46 returns" (*âm cực dương hồi*).
- 2667 *an inmate twice*/ at those resorts of mirth, and twice a slave/ "[she –68 stayed in] a green pavilion twice [and she put on] the blue smock [of a slave] twice."
- 2711 *Her soul was wandering through a grove of dreams*/ "The spirit was

- dreaming of cassia shrubs, the souls of plum trees." See note 1715.
- 2743 *his dear Kingfisher's nest*] "the Kingfisher's garden" (*vườn Thủy*). See note 280.
- 2744 *the scene had changed*] How Chin Chung discovered what had happened to the Wang family is told less elaborately in the Chinese novel: "As soon as he got back to his lodgings, he hurried to the Kingfisher View porch and asked about Ts'ui-ch'iao: she had left home four months ago and Yuan-wai Wang's whole family had also moved somewhere else. Thereupon he walked down the old path and looked for a long time without seeing a single soul. When he asked the neighbors, they told him all about old Wang's misfortune, about Ts'ui-ch'iao's selling herself, etc.: he was stunned. At once, he inquired and found his way to old Wang's new home: he saw a small hovel quite different from the former scene."
- 2747 *peach blossoms of last year*] were smiling, flirting yet with their east wind] The T'ang poet Ts'ui Hu (Thôi Hồ) wrote a quatrain entitled "Inscribed at a Place Visited Once Before": "A year ago, within this gate, / her face and peach blossoms both blushed alike. / I do not know where to look for her face. / Peach blossoms, though, still smile at their east wind." See note 793.
- 2777 *Our daughter Kiều is cursed by evil fate*] "[Our] daughter Kiều's lot is as thin as a sheet." Figuratively, to be "as thin as a sheet [of paper]" (*mỏng như tờ*) is to be marked by poverty, failure, or misfortune. See also notes 33, 411 and 753.
- 2794 *he ached*] "[he] wilted [with pain] like some vegetable salted and pickled" (*dầu như dưa*).
- 2801 *The plank's now nailed and fastened to the boat*] Ván đã đóng thuyền. This proverb expresses resigned acceptance of an irreversible situation.
- 2837 *his parents*] "the cedrela and the day lily" (*xuân-huân*). See notes 224 and 534.
- 2860 *the honor roll*] "the spring roster" (*bảng xuân*). Examinations for the chin-shih or highest degree, the equivalent of a doctorate, were usually held in spring.
- 2861 *flowers hailed them*] in His Majesty's park, fame reached their  
-62 *heaths*] "flowers greeted [them along] the lanes [planted with] almond trees [in the Imperial Gardens, and] fragrance wafted to the paths [planted with] elm trees [in their native villages]."
- 2867 *blue clouds*] thanh-vân, an official career for chin-shih graduates.
- 2869 *exchanged those vows of troth*] "given promises [as precious as] jade [and] sworn oaths [engraved in] bronze." See note 513.
- 2870 *sharing jade and gold*] "[crossing together] the Golden Horse [Gate] and [living together in] a jade mansion." About the Golden Horse Gate, see note 410.
- 2875 *his yamen*] "the lute-hall" (*cầm-dựng*). Tzu Chien (Tứ Tiên), a

disciple of Confucius, was such a wise magistrate that law and order prevailed in his subprefecture though he spent most of his time playing the lute. The yamen of an enlightened mandarin has become known as a "lute-hall."

- 2875 *he lived leisured days*] amidst the lute's sweet sounds, the crane's soft  
-76 *cries*] Under the Sung dynasty, Chao Pien (Triệu Biện) was an honest official with a simple way of life: when he was sent as governor to Shu (modern Szechwan) he took nothing with him but a lute and a crane.
- 2883 *kindred souls*] "sound and spirit [that] seek each other" (*thanh khí tuyn ng tâm*). See note 193.
- 2886 *Dô*] Tu in Chinese.
- 2970 *the bird*] "the wild goose's wing" (*cánh hồng*). The fall of a wild goose as a metaphor for quick, often heroic, death comes from an old Chinese saying: "There is a way of dying lighter than the feather of a wild goose" (*Tử hoặc khinh u hồng mao*). See also notes 945 and 2247.
- 2972 *the bird's disconsolate soul*] "the ching-wei's soul" (*hồn tinh-vệ*). According to Chinese mythology, after the daughter of Emperor Yen (Viêm-de) drowned at sea, her unhappy soul turned into a little bird called ching-wei (*tinh-vệ*), which has tried ever since to fill up the deep with twigs and pebbles.
- 2999 *She'd gone the way of night, they dwelt with day*] "[Between] darkness and sunlight [there are] two [separate] ways."
- 3000 *those Nine Springs*] cửu-nguyên. See notes 94, 710, 734 and 1685.
- 3010 *Father*] "the cedrela" (*xuân*). See note 534.  
*Mother*] "the day lily" (*huyên*). See note 224.
- 3017 *her mother's*] "[those of] the old day lily" (*huyên già*). See note 224.
- 3051 *Old Vuong exclaimed ...*] The father's little speech corresponds, in the Chinese novel, to what was said by three other people: the nun Chüeh-yüan, the mother, and Chin Chung.  
*Other times, other tides*] "Now is one time and then [was another time]" (*bây giờ nhặt thi*). Now is now, and then was then.
- 3052 *a saint*] "[someone who] lives the religious life" (*tu-hành*).
- 3067 *Amber and mustard seed, lodestone and pin*] "[it's] the lot of a mustard [seed], the fate of a pin" (*phận cải duyên kim*). Predestined, people are drawn together in love and marriage just as a mustard seed is attracted by amber and an iron pin or needle by lodestone. See also note 769.
- 3068 *when blood is spilt, the gut turns soft*] máu chảy ruột mềm. This is a proverb about family solidarity: when a relative gets hurt, the other members of the family feel hurt and cannot remain unconcerned about his or her trouble.
- 3071 *the mirror cracked is whole again*] gương vỡ lại lành (in Chinese, phả kinh trùng viên). Lovers, spouses, or members of a group, separated or estranged from one another, are happily reunited.
- 3072 *Heaven*] "the sacred potter's wheel" (*khuôn thiêng*).

- 3075 *The tree still bears some three or seven plums*/ VÂN implies that KIỀU is not yet too old for marriage by alluding to a courtship song (Poem 20) in *The Book of Odes*: “Plop drop the plums./but there are seven left./Good sirs who’re courting me,/choose quick a lucky day./Plop drop the plums,/but there are three left still./Good sirs who’re courting me,/make up your minds right now./Plop drop the plums—/a basket gathers them./Good sirs who’re courting me,/speak up while there’s still time.”
- 3076 *The peach stays fresh*/ The young, fresh peach tree (*dào non*) is the image of a beautiful bride according to a wedding song (Poem 6) in *The Book of Odes*. See also note 1010.
- to tie the knot] “to spin the silk thread” (*xe to*). See notes 333 and 549.
- 3104 *the homespun costume of a virtuous wife*] “coarse cloth [for a skirt] and a thorn [for a hairpin]” (*bô-kinh*). See note 505.
- 3110 *let’s turn it into friendship—let’s be friends*] “[let’s] turn the love [of two people who play a duet with] the lute and the harp [into the friendship of two people who play] the lute or chess [together].” The duet on the lute and the harp (*câm-sát*) stands for married love and harmony while playing the lute or chess (*câm-ký*) symbolizes friendship.
- 3111 *marriage with its red silk thread*] See notes 333 and 549.
- 3126 *Hsiao, a passerby ignored*/ Under the T'ang dynasty, young Hsiao (Tiêu-lang) had a beautiful wife named Lu-chu (Lục-châu, “Green Pearl”). She was abducted and offered as a concubine to the powerful general Kuo Tzu-i (Quách Tử Nghi). After that time, she no longer recognized her former husband and looked away when she saw him in the street. That incident is alluded to in a couplet by the T'ang poet Ts'ui Chiao (Thôi Giao). Forced by poverty to sell a beautiful and talented concubine into the household of a court official, he still loved her and wrote a poem for her: “Once you enter the gate of the great it's as deep as the sea./Since then young Hsiao has become a mere passerby in the street” (*Hầu môn nhất nhập thảm như hái./Tòng thư Tiêu lang thị lộ nhân*). According to tradition, the concubine's new master was so moved by the poet's devotion to her that he let her go back to him.
- 3137 *a lotus sprout*] About the lotus and love, see note 2242.
- 3175 *If I long searched the sea for my lost pin*] “To grope for a pin on the bottom of the sea” (*dảy bể mò kim*) is the Vietnamese equivalent of “to look for a needle in a haystack.”
- 3176 *it was true love, not lust, that urged me on*] “[it was] mostly [because of a troth etched in] bronze and stone and [not because I wanted] to look for [the pleasures of a love that is as fickle as] the moon and flowers.” See notes 513 and 1448.
- 3178 *to live in concord*] “[to behave toward each other like two people who

- play a duet with] the harp and the lute” (*sát-câm*). See note 3110.
- to share one bed*] “[to share] a blanket and a pillow” (*chân-gối*). The two items, used together, suggest sexual intimacy or marital relationship.
- 3200 *Was it a butterfly or Master Chuang?*] A well-known passage in the *Chuang-tzu*, a Taoist classic, reads: “Chuang Chou once dreamed that he was a butterfly, fluttering to and fro and enjoying itself. Suddenly he woke up and was Chuang Chou again. But he did not know whether he was Chuang Chou who had dreamed that he was a butterfly, or whether he was a butterfly dreaming that it was Chuang Chou.”
- 3201 *And who poured forth this rhapsody of love? / The king of Shu or just a*
- 02 *cuckoo-bird?*] Emperor Wang (Wang-tî or Võng-dê), whose name was Tu Yü (Đỗ Vũ), ruled Shu (in modern Szechwan) as an exemplary sovereign until he fell in love with his minister's wife and had an affair with her. Discovered, he yielded the throne to the offended husband and fled into shamed seclusion in the mountains. He died there and turned into the cuckoo (or nightjar), whose mournful cry bemoans the double loss of his realm and his love.
- 3204 *Lan-t'ien*] a mountain in Shensi renowned for its jade. Lines 3200, 3202, 3203, and 3204 are adapted from the four middle lines of “The Ornamented Zither,” the best known and least understood poem of the T'ang poet Li Shang-yin (Lý Thủ Công An; 813–58): “Chuang-tzu's dawn dream evokes a butterfly./Wang-tî's spring heart rests in a cuckoo-bird./On the vast sea moon-lit pearls gleam with tears./On Mount Lan-t'ien sun-warmed jade gives off smoke” (*Trang sinh hiếu mộng mê hổ diệp./Võng dê xuân tâm thác dỗ quyền./Thương hái nguyệt minh châu hửu lệ./Lam diên nhât noàn ngọc sinh yên*).
- 3220 *who'd with her favors skip from man to man*] “[who'd give] peaches [to one man] in the morning and plums [to another man] in the evening.” The phrase *sờm dào tỗi mặn*, with its connotations of sexual promiscuity and infidelity, is here given a pejorative twist that it does not necessarily have in Line 1289.
- 3237 *a stooping tree*] Poem 4 in *The Book of Odes* speaks of a “stooping tree” (*cù-móc*), a tree with down-curving branches around which cling many vines. Originally, it must have referred to a lord, who shelters and supports many dependents and retainers. In Vietnamese literary tradition, it has mainly stood for a first-rank wife as the protector of her husband's concubines (see also notes 902, 1350, 1480 and 1633 for creepers and climbers that metaphorically represent concubines). In this line, while the “stooping tree” clearly designates VÂN as Kim's chief spouse, it can also be broadly interpreted to mean a mother who takes good care of her numerous brood of children, a tree that casts its shade over “a yardful of sophoras and cassia shrubs.”
- 3238 *a yardful of sophoras and cassia shrubs*] Under the Sung dynasty, Tou

Yü-chün (Đậu Vũ Quân) was blessed with five brilliant sons: they all took the highest honors at literary examinations. The poet Feng Tao (Phùng Đạo) celebrated them in a poem as the Five Cassias (*Ngũ Quết*). About sophoras as offspring, see note 1257.

3248 *talent and disaster form a pair*) The word for "talent" (tài; in Chinese, *ts'ai*) rhymes with the word for "misfortune" (taí, in Chinese, *tsai*).

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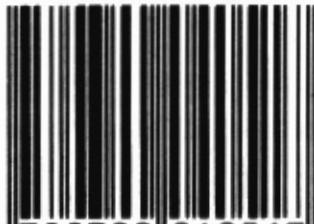
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