

Hoang Ly

## FANTASY AND REALITY

Everyone knows that fantasy is built on some foundation of reality. Fantasy is the association from one sense to other sense (Ex: ***the house is as large as the sound of the gong ringing*** – Poetry epic *Dam San*, a hero of Tay Nguyen, mountain region in the center of VN).

Most of fantasy in artistic creation is an extension, an exaggeration or a metaphor of reality. It is the case of my poem, ***“The woman and the old house”***. The poem is inspired by the great house of my grandfather and I have dedicated my poem to it (house #14). It is a famous old house in Hanoi, Vietnam’s capital. The house was devastated heavily by time and historical events. It is a very sad story. And I was born in this house.

*“... Underneath the mirror-like sparkling plank-bed  
Is the night of the last century  
Underneath the mirror-like sparkling plank-bed  
Cockroaches wag their antennae and sniff”*  
.....  
*“The woman dressed in her white tunic sits cross-legged  
Draining dry her eyes to absorb the night  
Slow and steady her body disintegrates  
Draining dry her eyes soaking up thousands of rainfalls  
The old house is submerged in crying...”*

The night dream is one form of fantasy. It makes deformed fragments of reality and collects them into a story that translates our wishes. I can say that I am a “dreamy” person, because I have a lot of dreams. Some of them are fantastic, some of them are frightening, some of them are funny, and most of them are dreams of flying up. I made a series of paintings about my dreams, and I have shown them in my first exhibition entitled “Dreams”. I also express my dreams in poems. One of them relates a dream in which I grew wings, transformed into a bird and flew up. Through that poem, I expressed my conflict between the wish to become a bird flying away and the reality that I am a human living in this noisy life with limited frames of society.

*“I dream I’ve a beautiful pair of wings  
made of pellucid silk  
kind of dreamy silk  
as transparent as when you look deep into my eyes...”*

Fantasy also attaches to the awareness about religion. The Vietnamese culture is influenced strongly by spiritualism and Buddhism. We believe in fate, and in omens, and in the existence of a “*yin world*” with damned souls. But we also have the will to counteract bad fate. So in my poems, the haunting of spirits is intertwining with the will of resisting, to affirm my personality (ex: the poems “*The ghost butterfly*” and “*Night Number 2*”).

My poetry usually departs from emotions in my real life. But I invest in poetry my own way of seeing reality, of making the associations based on the real. Take the poem “ *The Mekong river is flowing.*” It was inspired by a trip on the MeKong River, during this time we heard the news of the Iraq war’s bursting out. At that moment I felt the roll of the river associated with the pain emerging in my heart.

Fantasy in my poetry used to come from some concrete thing or image of the reality. Sometimes I depict the real through my own vision that transforms it. Sometimes, I just use it as a support to develop my fantasy. Take the poem “*The ghost butterfly*”. It is true that a ghost-butterfly was flying into my studio one day. A lot of Vietnamese think ghost-butterflies carry the dead’s soul, others say they are bad omens. So seeing that butterfly, right away I associated it with my worryment about love. The poem is a dialogue of “*you*” – an imagined character – and the character “*I*”, with the real ghost butterfly as an intermediary. At that moment, the ghost-butterfly incarnated the bad omen of love trouble. Fantasy and reality confused one another and became one. The ghost butterfly became the cause for me to empty my heart. I gave it a presumed role:

*“You said the butterfly would bring bad luck”,*

then I resist it:

*“I carelessly brushed my hand across my face*

*My hand covered with paint*

*The different colors streaked my cheek*

*Frightened*

*The ghost butterfly*

*Took flight”*

Now I am going to finish my second book of poetry entitled “*The night is flowing towards the sky*”. It is written completely about night: my fantasy, imagination, thoughts of the night, my inspiration on the night. It is a collection of different portraits of the night drawn by me.

Everybody used to see the night as darkness, as the sleeping time of the world. But try to sit here and imagine, have your fantasy about night. What will you see then? What color does the night have? How does it look? What happens in the night? The night can be a round, or

a square, it is small or big, has smell or no smell. You can image and create the night your own way. In fact, the power of imagination could lead us to the irrational point when our emotion comes to the utmost so that our feelings pass through reality.

I have seen different faces of the night. I can see the night during the day in the sunshine. I can feel the night in my heart. It becomes the thing upon my palm, I can put it on my hair, on my refrigerator, on my bed, on the tank in the battle-field, on the dead and living, on you, on the book I am writing. The night can be placed on my tongue. I swallow it or pronounce it: *night*. I pronounce it softly, then more loudly, then I shout: **NIGHT**. You see, the night is immense around us, right now. So, what really is the night? Are you sure that you know it?

When I set to write, nothing is fantasy, nothing is reality, it is simply what is appearing in my mind that forces me to write. I don't care whether it is fantasy or reality, but I have to, with my own language of poetry, analyze the "AND" of what I must write down.

The theme of my work is always about the complicated internal life of Vietnamese women in a society that is on its way to overcoming the bounds of the past, heading towards women's liberation and gender equality.

I want to express the contrast between "revolt" will and "acceptance" habits of Vietnamese modern women. They sometimes want to deform their "hut of fate", but in the end, they listen back to their sacrifice vocation that is the heritage of generations of Vietnamese women.

## Vietnamese Literature

The Vietnamese people traditionally nurture a great love for literature. Up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most Vietnamese literary works had been in the form of either poetry or rhythmic prose. Many dissertations, appeals to the people made by patriots, heroes, kings and lords are considered reputed masterpieces. Particularly, the 3,000-verse epic *Kieu*, a masterpiece by Nguyễn Du (1766-1820), is so famous that almost all Vietnamese people know by heart some of its verses. Most of the poetry and prose in the past was written in *Hàn* and *Noãn*. Along with the written literature, the rich and diverse oral literature has significantly contributed to the spiritual life of the people, especially of laborers.

From 1945 to 1975, Vietnamese literature focused mainly on the people's heroism to mobilize the masses in the struggle against foreign aggression and for national reunification.

Since 1986, Vietnamese literature has experienced a "renovation" process. In particular, short stories on diversified themes have had much success and drawn the attention of readers inside and outside Vietnam. Many of them have been translated into foreign languages, such as English, French, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, etc.