

LÊ PHAM LÊ

VIETNAM / USA (1950–)

LANGUAGE: VIETNAMESE

ĐƠN SƠ

Lạc loài trên đất tạm dung.

Dựng căn chòi nhỏ bên vùng biển êm.

Bàn tay chai cứng, đà mềm.

Đêm trăng soi bóng bên thềm đọc thơ.

Đong đưa chiếc võng chùng tơ.

Điệu ru ngày cũ À ơ...ví dầu...

Chòi sau lác lẻo nhíp cầu.

Buồm xa thắp thoáng bóng tàu lác lự.

Bềnh bồng sóng nước vô tư.

Gió ơi, đưa mối sàu dư sang bờ!



Born in South Vietnam, Lê Pham Lê was introduced to poetry by her grandmother, who sang traditional lullabies to her as she went to bed. At the end of the Vietnam War (1955-1975), Lê Pham Lê's country was taken over by North Vietnam. She fled the country with her husband and baby. The three of them spent a year at a refugee camp in Malaysia before immigrating to the United States. During that year, Lê Pham Lê wrote poetry in order to escape from the tragic reality around her. Her poetry is inspired the 2,000-year-old Vietnamese tradition of "sung poetry," which originated from the verses sung by peasants as they worked in the rice paddies.

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY		
WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
A ơ...ví dầu... (phrase)	lyrics from a song; literally means <i>Well err...for oil...</i>	Well err...for oil... (song lyrics)
bàn tay (n.)	the end parts of a person's arms beyond the wrists	hands, palms
bên (prep.)	situated within or close to someone or something	nearby, along, on, inside
bềnh bồng (adj.)	carried slowly by a current of air or water	floating, bobbing up and down, drifting, meandering
bóng (n.)	a mark, object, or other indication of the existence or passing of something	shadow, hint, umbrage, image, trace, sign
buồm (n.)	piece of material extended on a mast to catch the wind and propel a boat	sail, canvas, sailcloth, tarp
căn chòi nhỏ (n.)	a small, crude shelter used by the poor or for temporary use	hut, tent, shelter, hovel, shanty, shack, shed
chai cứng (adj.)	having an area of hardened skin	calloused, work-hardened, rough, coarse, rugged, crude, chapped
chiếc võng (n.)	a bed made of canvas or rope and suspended by chords at the end	hammock
chòi sau (prep.)	at or to the further side of	behind, beyond, after, past
chùng (adj.)	not held tightly in position	loose, sagging, slack, limp, hanging
đà (n.)	a piece of hard, solid mineral matter	stone, rock, boulder, pebble, gravel, granite
dất (n.)	an expanse of the earth's surface that is not covered by water	land, country, area, region, territory, terrain, soil
đêm (n.)	the period of darkness between sunset and sunrise	night, nighttime, after dark, nightfall, darkness, dusk to dawn

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
điều ru (n.)	a quiet, gentle song sung to send a child to sleep	lullaby, cradle song, nighttime song, hymn
đọc (v.)	to repeat aloud for an audience	we read aloud, we recite, we deliver, we perform, we reel off, we repeat, we chant
đong đưa (v.)	moves slowly or rhythmically backward and forward or from side to side	sways, swings, rocks
đơn sơ (n. / adj.)	the quality or condition of being easy to understand or do	simplicity, simple, plainness, plain, ease, clarity, candor
dư (adj.)	remaining after the greater part or quantity has gone	residual, surplus, extra, lingering, enduring, leftover
dựng (v.)	to assemble parts or materials together in order to create something	we build, we construct, we erect, we put up, we fashion, we make
đưa (v.)	to move something or someone to a place	bring, take, carry, fetch, bear, shepherd, haul, transport
êm (adj.)	free from disturbance	quiet, tranquil, gentle, peaceful, restful, calm
gió ổi (n.)	perceptible natural movement of the air	wind, current, breeze, draft, gale, gust
lắc lẻo nhip cầu (n.)	raised platform on a ship that allows safe passage when the weather deck is washed by heavy seas	monkey bridge, flying bridge, flying gangway
lạc loài (adj.)	having no home or having wandered away or forced from home	lost, stray, exiled, misplaced, wayward, banished, outcast
lắc lư (adj.)	moving unsteadily from side to side	shaking, swaying, wobbling, rocking, teetering
mềm (adj.)	easy to mold, cut, compress, break, or fold	soft, brittle, tender, delicate, fragile
mối sầu (adj. + n.)	the speaker's feeling of deep distress caused by loss, disappointment, or other misfortune	my grief, my sorrow, my melancholy, my worries, my strife

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
ngày cũ (adj.)	from former times	old, olden, past, ancient
sang bờ (adv.)	to or on land from the direction of the sea	to shore, ashore, to dry land, shoreward, across the sea
soi bóng (v.)	gives out a bright light	is reflected, is illuminated, shines, glows, glimmers, glistens
sóng nước (n.)	slow regular movements of the sea	waves, ripples, swells, surges, tides, ebb and flow
tạm dung (adj.)	not previously visited, seen, or encountered	strange, foreign, unfamiliar, alien, unknown, new
tàu (n.)	a vessel for transporting people or goods by sea	ship, boat, barge, sailboat, yacht, ark, skiff
thấp thoáng (v.)	makes small, quick movements	flickers, flutters, quivers, spasms, dances
thềm (n.)	an elevated structure on which people or things can stand	threshold, platform, deck, scaffold
thơ (n.)	writing arranged with a metrical rhythm	verse, poetry, poems
tơ (adj.)	made of a fine, strong, soft, lustrous fiber produced by silkworms	silky, silk, of silk
trăng (n.)	the natural satellite of the earth, visible at night by reflected light from the sun	moon, orb, satellite
trên (prep.)	surrounded by or within the confines of	in, upon, within, among
vô tư (adj.)	having no particular anxiety, interest, or sympathy	carefree, indifferent, disinterested, fair, even-minded
vùng biển (n.)	stretches or bodies of colorless, transparent liquid	waters, oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, shores
xa (adj.)	situated at a great distance in space or time	far, faraway, afar, remote, far-flung, outlying

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

PHRASE BY PHRASE

Đơn Sơ _____

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Dựng căn chòi nhỏ bên vùng biển êm. _____

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Gió ơi, đưa mối sầu dư sang bờ! _____

REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: _____

Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation? What did you manage to keep?

Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so, does it make sense in the poem or not?
