

Poetess  
**Hồ Xuân Hương**



**Thiếu nữ ngủ ngày**

Mùa hè hây hẩy gió nồm đông  
Thiếu nữ nằm chơi quá giấc nồng  
Lược trúc lỏng cài trên mái tóc  
Yếm đào trễ xuống dưới nương long  
Đôi gò Bông đảo sương còn ngậm  
Một lạch đào nguyên suối chưa thông  
Quần tử dưng dẳng đi chẳng dứt  
Đi thì cũng dờ ở không xong.

**Day Sleeping Girl**

Summer breeze is sporadically blowing,  
Lying down the young girl slides into sleeping.  
Her bamboo comb loosely attached to her hair,  
Her pink bra below her waist dropped down fair.  
On these two Elysian mounds, the nectar is still  
remaining,  
In that one Fairy rivulet, the current seems to stop  
flowing.  
At such a view, the gentleman hesitated,  
Odd to leave, yet inconvenient if he stayed.

# Nữ thi sĩ lỗi lạc

*Đôi gò Bông đảo sương còn ngậm  
Một lạch đào nguyên suối chưa thông*

**S**peaking of Hồ Xuân Hương creates in everyone of us not only an ardent admiration but also food for thought back to the time when Confucianism kept on draining all the vital outbursts of a closed society and literature, the source of social prestige remained in having the exclusive right to sit in the triennial examinations for the recruitment of mandarins.

Before occupying a good place in the official history of Vietnamese literature published in 1980 by the Institute of Literature of Vietnam, **Hồ Xuân Hương** was in the past a source of inexhaustible controversy between those who saw in her a wonderful woman who dared without shame to tackle the rights to her sex and carnal love in the time of feudal darkness, and those who found that her poetry, putting too much accent on the glorification of sexual instinct, was a disappointment for the Vietnamese literature and an attack and an stain to the model Vietnamese woman. It should be admitted that Ho Xuan Huong is a woman ahead of her time, a woman who knows how to use her intelligence to denounce hypocrisy and absurdity at a time when society was ruled by unchanging Confucian ethics, a woman who dares revolt against prohibitions and taboos for the liberalization of the woman, physical as well as moral. She loved to confront and beat Messieurs the learned men with their own weapons. She succeeded in evading formal censorship by an uncommon cleverness, proceeding with allusions and metaphores.

*Viet-Nam mon pays natal. Terre des dragons et des légendes. Đặng Anh Tuấn. Copyright 1997-2009*

## Các Cớ grotto

Yin and Yang created this chunk of rock;  
A deep and dark crack split it into two blocks.  
Moss covered openings expose themselves with  
impudence  
Wind enhanced firs produce sound of rhythmic cadence.  
Drops of romantic water fall with splash  
Roads to nowhere lead in dark labyrinth.  
Praise to the sculptor inventing this distortion  
Indecent exposure invites lots of observation

### Hang Các Cớ

Trời đất sinh ra đá một chòm  
Nứt ra đôi mảnh hóm hòm  
Kê hằm rêu mốc tro toen hoén  
Luồng gió thông reo vỗ phập phồng  
Giọt nước hữu tình rơi lổm bõm  
Con đường vô ngạn tối om om  
Khen ai để đá tái xuyên tạc  
Khéo hở hénh ra lấm kê dòm

## The fan

Are you seventeen or eighteen?(1)  
Let me cherish you by all means.  
Thin or thick you display a triangle, and  
Large or small I hold you with one hand.  
The more it is hot the fresher you will submit,  
Not enough love at night, daytime will make it.  
Your cheeks are rose pink and give you grace,  
Lords and kings love you because of your face.

### Vịnh cái quạt

Mười bảy hay là mười tám đây  
họ ta yêu dẫu chẳng rời tay  
Mỏng dày chừng ấy, chành ba góc  
Rộng hẹp dường nào, cầm một cây.  
Càng nóng bao nhiêu thời càng mát  
Yêu đêm không phỉ lại yêu ngày  
Hồng hồng má phấn duyên vì cậy  
Chúa dẫu vua yêu một cái này.

To talk about things the most crude in society, about erotism in particular, she resorted to harmless description of the landscape and familiar objects. The Jack-Fruit, The Floating Cake, The Fan, The Grotto of Các Cớ, Weaving at Midnight, The Day Sleeping Girl are the titles the best known and witness her talent and knack of knowing how to create the rhythms comparable to those in popular songs ( **ca dao** ) and use a surprisingly simple vocabulary in her poetry. A manuscript in "nom" from the Library of Sciences recorded in 1912 counted only 23 poems but it is noted that the number of poems attributed to Hồ Xuân Hương has grown with the time. Therefore even its existence was put to doubt in the past.

Hồ Xuân Hương could have been original of Quỳnh Đôi village, Quỳnh Lưu district, Nghe An province. Her father **Hồ Phi Diên** is issue of the Ho family of scholars ( Hồ Phi ). According to the French researcher Maurice Durand, she was not very attractive physically based on the two verses from Hồ Xuân Hương's Jack-Fruit:

**My body is like the jack-fruit on the tree,  
Its skin is rough, its clove is thick.**

This deduction seemed less convincing by the fact that even she was not beautiful, she must have been charming because she was married twice then widowed and having many flirts such as **Chiêu Hồ ( Phạm Đình Hồ )**. Because of her biting and licentious verve, some people see in her a sex maniac, a genie of lust; that is the case of Nguyễn Văn Hạnh and the French researcher **Maurice Durand** in "Works of Vietnamese poetess Hồ Xuân Hương", Ecole française d'Extreme Orient, Adrien Maisonneuve, Paris 1968. On the other hand, other people do not hesitate to defend her with fanfare, finding her not only a feminist of the first hour but also a woman having the gut to live and defy a society of mummies and ghosts. It is the case of writer **Nguyễn Đức Bình** in the monthly review Văn Nghệ. ( Arts and Literature ) No. 62.

(1): Seventeen or nineteen branches of the fan could be understood as seventeen or eighteen.

### Nighttime Weaving

Light turned on, it is found such a white,  
The stalk moves slightly and repeatedly all night.  
Pushing with the feet, but lightly release,  
Shuttle passing through brings joy and ease.  
Large or narrow, small or big they all fit,  
Long and short, size and form so be it.  
To make it best, girl needs to soak it with care.  
The cloth color won't fade before three whole years.

### Dệt cử

Thấp ngọn đèn lên thấy trắng phau  
Con cò mấp máy suốt đêm thâu  
Hai chân đạp xươ'ng nằng nằng nhấc  
Mô.t suốt đêm ngang thích thích nhau  
Rộng hẹp nhỏ to vừa vặn cả  
Ngắn dài khuôn khổ cũng như nhau  
Cô nào muốn tốt ngâm cho kỹ  
Chờ đến ba thu mới dải màu

Extracted from the book intituled "Aigrettes sur la rivièrè" of Mr Lê Thành Khôi.

If Hồ Xuân Hương is a rose with thorns, a lonely and almost unique voice in the Vietnamese literature, she has nonetheless the courage and the audacity to throw a stone and spread the trouble in a stagnant and rotting pond that became the Vietnamese society at the end of 18th century. Contrary to other great scholars preferring looking for solitude to devote themselves to contemplation of nature and meditation in drunkenness, Hồ Xuân Hương preferred to combat it alone at her time using her verve, her poems to experiment the wrath of a woman revolting and thundering against injustice of the Vietnamese society. She deserves the homage that American writer **Henri Miller** rendered two centuries later to a female writer of 20th century in his forewords for " Fear of flying" by Erica Jong, Robert Laffont, 1976:

**She writes like a man. However it is a woman with 100% woman. On many points, she is more direct and more frank than many male authors.**