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KIM VÂN KIEU
of Nguyen Du (1765–1820)

A translation by
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PREFACE

Nguyen Du was a Vietnamese official displaced in a dynastic shift and sent into provincial exile in the service of his new overlord. There, his duties appear not to have been too burdensome, allowing him to pursue literary work, among which the most notable product was *Kim Vân Kieu*. Throughout the remainder of his life after the overthrow of the ruling house of his youth he pined for his former state, never ceasing to hold in private to his original loyalty, and a convention has grown which sees in Kieu's saga of wanderings and travail Du's own identification with her. Since I would have the reader move as quickly as possible to the poem itself I offer no more than this fragment of background, but further information about the man should be found nowadays in reasonably-sized libraries and data bases. As for other English renderings of the work, which readers may want to contrast with mine, I direct them especially to the annotated translation by Le Xuan Thuy and that of Huynh Sanh Thong, this last being a parallel version, the English face set out in blank iambic pentameter.*

Those familiar with the Vietnamese original or with the above translations may like to view this present offering, by comparison, as rather more of a paraphrase. It had in fact been in my mind to do a stricter translation, but one that would strike a balance between scholarly absorption in the material being presented and concern with meeting the minds of the public to

whom it is presented—a balance not quite attained, it seemed to me, in the above versions. In their case, the literary effort made to engage readers appeared far too secondary to a literal delivery of the work, even allowing for the endeavour in format made in the instance of Huynh Sanh Thong. Considering that English was not the first language of those translators, their labours may well be described as heroic, but they have not been—I stress, to me—ultimately satisfying. My initially limited intention altered over time, through the stimulus of the poem itself, into a desire to produce an expansive interpretation—although restrained in its wanderings by constant reference back to each successive line of the original number in *Du*, in the manner of a parallel translation. Some liberties of exposition and expression have therefore been taken, and the justifications for those are as follows. Firstly, I want *per se*—that is, from a simple desire to share an enjoyment—to attract as wide as possible an English-reading public to this excellent and relatively little-known melodrama (Verdi and Puccini, had it been available to them, would have found much matter for operatic realism in it). Secondly, I have hoped to present the work—intellectually, morally, socially—as both exotic and usefully insightful in the broad. For beyond the philosophic mullings on the exhilarations and—unfortunately more so—the sorrows of the temporal experience that it represents to its own country, and which make it further revelatory of that interesting country, *Kim Vân Kieu* deals with identifiable and acceptable universalities. Finally and procedurally, those ambitions have entailed keeping an eye and an ear attentive to what normally literate Anglophone readers might take pleasure in—making the story as palatable as possible principally by treating the imaginative propensities of such readers (in as much as I know them from my own) as less of a *tabula rasa* than appears to have been done by the esteemed predecessors referred to.

Notations, front, back or foot, though often unavoidable in normal translations, can at times be used to prop up insensitive

exposition, and it became a challenge to produce something that was comprehensible and comprehensive while devoid of those accretions—which would also have tended to suggest less entertainment than I would want perceived in my version and more scholarship than it warranted. Yet I soon became convinced, while developing the first drafts, that little would be lost or be confusing if the work were to dispense with marginal elucidations, as long as its environment was—I hesitate to use the word—‘poetic’: that is to say, one naturally stimulating imaginative cooperation. Well, without losing sight of what centuries of genuine poetry have produced, I have done my best to create that environment; not hesitating in the process, additionally, to incorporate in it bits of extraneous cultural information, touchings-up where there have been discerned tendencies towards illogicality or discontinuity in Du (acceptable in their time and milieu, perhaps, but liable to bother modern readers), nor to make minor technical contributions which I thought would assist readers in following the development of the story, add to characterisation, give the appropriate colour to dialogue, and so on, all hopefully unobtrusive. There should be no chance of mistaking those for Du’s own commentary, usually didactic, scattered throughout the work. While claiming that such contributions have been made with discipline and utmost respect for the original, I might also remark that one need not be excessively apologetic when straying from Du, in view of his own example; for he was fairly ruthless when converting the Chinese tale of two centuries earlier whilst establishing *his* perception of its dynamics. Be that as it may, my attempts at forbearance, the occasional limitations on exposition imposed by the rhyme-metre format used here, and, finally, Du’s allusiveness—he is credited with some 500 references to Chinese works, totally beyond my power to reproduce—all mean, however, that the reader will still have need, will have free scope in fact, for the imaginative exercises referred to. And if unresolved obscurities should prompt

him to investigate the work nearer its source, that would be all to the good anyway.

I so far thought to present the tale in its sufficient attractiveness without the above-mentioned accretions, that I had hoped also to be able to do away with this Preface; but the needs of publishing convention may as well serve here to make a couple of points immediately that would have become self-evident sooner or later in the course of reading the text. The first is this humble offering, perhaps still useful in a multicultural age to those without specific Asian interests: Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language, and no matter the combination of letters, or however many vowels a word or name presents, that word or name remains an irreducible formal unit and for purposes of versification has one beat. The unwary are thus enjoined to guard against mentally dividing unusual combinations such as 'Kieu' or 'Tuyen'. It may help to remind English-speakers that common familiar diphthongs such as 'Kew' and the first part of 'twen-ty' (to roughly approximate the Vietnamese examples) each contain two tied vowel-sounds, which are nevertheless accepted as forming monosyllables. Vietnamese has simply gone further, to three-vowel units. The second matter, and still on a linguistic bent, is that Vietnamese diacritical marks have been largely avoided here, principally because they would have little meaning for the generality of readers to whom this version of *Kim Vân Kieu* is offered, and who would, indeed, possibly find them an annoyance. The 'hat'-mark has been retained in two cases (â and ô) where rhyming precision is involved, and it was thought best to use it everywhere else those sounds occurred, for the sake of consistency. Removal of diacritics has created the minor peculiarity that two of the story's characters are apparently left with the same name: 'Tu'. The choice was one of either arraying both with their complement of marks—again presenting no elucidation for most readers—or rendering one of the names phonetically to produce 'Too', an excessively radical change, it

was thought. However, Vietnamese names, one often hears, belong to the class of those especially unvarying, so, hopefully, there will be an acceptance of the situation presented here, particularly as the two figures barely cross paths. Wherever practicable, I have translated name-difficulties away, either literally or suggestively.

Turning from the nomenclature of the protagonists to that of the work itself, it may be of interest to those who will decide to seek out further information on the poem, that there have been recent tendencies to give it some such title as *The Tale of Kieu*, in the case of translations, and the Vietnamese equivalent of that form, in modern re-publications in Vietnam. This is understandable, for it cannot be denied that Kieu is the central character in the story, and her adventures occupy exclusively the middle third of it. However, on considering why traditionally the title has been a construct of three names— Kieu's, that of her beloved (Kim), and that of her sister (Vân), the last two figures of the trio remaining physically absent from much of the story—it seemed inescapable to me that the others are very much borne along by Kieu as affective mental presences that impinge in episode after episode on her moods and thoughts, and, therefore, must also on our perception of the story as we read along. The reality of the past, her family, her youthful hopes, are all a significant constant in Kieu's varied situations, and comprise an influence that has the power to materially steer the course of events—as it most clearly does in one spectacular and tragic instance in the latter part of the poem. Kim and Vân are centrally located in that reality, in Kieu's mind, and surely an important psychological determinant is missed, and both Kieu as a character and the story as a whole are diminished or skewed by the misunderstanding implied in a narrower title.

Finally, this is the spot where dedications and thanks for help rendered are located. I offer the following pages as a small contribution to the honourable tradition of amateur work done by

ex-soldiers who, to use an effective description by George Bernard Shaw, have 'reforged their muskets into microscopes', investigating in the leisure of their retirement—hopefully for wider utility and enjoyment—things first glimpsed in the furores of service. My wife Anne has been the amused muse behind this most unlikely foray into letters by her husband, deriving from some germ planted those years ago. She knows my thoughts.

* *Kim-Van-Kieu*, English translation, footnotes and commentaries by Le-Xuan-Thuy. Saigon: Nha sach Khai-Tri, 1968. *The Tale of Kieu: a bilingual edition of Truyen Kieu*, translated and annotated by Huynh Sanh Thong. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

The
KIM VÂN KIEU
of Nguyen Du (1765–1820)

I

Were full five-score the years allotted to born man,
How oft his qualities might yield within that span
to fate forlorn!

In time the mulberry reclaims the sunk sea-bourn,
And what the gliding eye may first find fair weighs mournful
on the heart.

5 Uncanny? Nay—lack ever proved glut's counterpart,
And minded are the gods on rosy cheeks to dart
celestial spite...



On fragrant parchments, old and leafed by candlelight,
Or scribed upon bound bamboo tiles, a tale bedight
in romance states

10 That at Gia-Tinh's ascent, the Minh then potentates,
When peace blest all four zones, both capitals with gates and
wards entire,

There dwelt the household of one Vuong, a certain squire
Of such content degree as might fair grants that sire his heirs
allot.

He had a son, in line of birth the last begot:

Vuong-Quan. It was intended that a scholar's slot from him
progress.

- 15 Two daughters too there were, of ken and comeliness:
 Thuy-Kieu, the elder girl, who with Thuy-Vân, the less, in
 lissom show
 Folk likened to twin apricots, in virtue snow;
 Each bearing unlike as like their graces though, the annals
 say.
 And joy it is to read the lauds that Vân portray:
- 20 A gaze as mild as moonlight from beneath a splay of brows
 silk-laid,
 Her smile a bud, speech native and confirmed as jade,
 Complexion, lilies; hair—sun's sheen on clouds, the shade
 of midmost night!
 But flourished these delights besides those yet
 more bright
 In one who might have lent her brilliant sister light
 for looks and skills.
- 25 Kieu's eyes autumnal waters were; brows, lowland hills
 In silhouette! The very willows glassed in rills her
 lines might rue,
 Her limber pass a throne or citadel undo!
 Beyond those charms she matchless talents teeming-drew
 from wits possessed
 Of sympathies oft said to overbear that breast.
- 30 Her noble brush!—none better dipped to manifest in paint
 a tale.
 Her euphonies!—a mistress of the classic scale
 Was she, whose *hò-câm* lute to high Ngai Truong might veil
 but no bard more:
 As when she set to fireside chaunts an ode of yore
 That thereby grew to be the desperate and foregone *Love and*
 Chance.
- 35 She trumped the red-silk-trousered sex in elegance,
 That green spring of her years when nubile maids enhance
 with arts their hair ...

II

Behind chaste screens the girls live closed in peace.
 Out there,
Across the east-wall, swains—bees, butterflies—pose, flare,
 unheeded flit;
The days fly swallow-like, like shuttles interknit,
40 And of that season's radiant ninety sixty's writ has
 wound to end,
The grasses, verdant, fresh, horizonward extend
And late-flushed pear trees full have fused their independent
 specks of white.
 Befalls the third moon month, the Festival of Light,
A time for solemn laving of the graves, of sprightly meadow
 strolls
45 And merry mill of throngs, like swallows, orioles ...
And here our youngsters come, in garb whose grace extols
 returned glad spring,
There, notables parade, blades blushing beauties ring,
Sedans wend, horses, silks of varied cut and cling ... the air
 abounds
With incense smoke above the tumuli and mounds,
50 Cash-paper for the needy dead flares, skips, gilds grounds,
 floats ashes round ...

But waxing post-noon shadows trace at last
east-bound,
And, linked, the brother and the maids, three hearts
compounded, amble back.
In time a runnel-bank provides a dipping track
That draws their eyes to contemplating with each tack
the vale's tableau:

55 The rivulet repeatedly recurved below,
Which froths then stills where stands a tiny pontal
bow superimposed.

Beside the path a burial mound sags, scarce disclosed
Beneath drooped grasses coarse and sere, their seed
scale-hosed, stems faded green.

60 Exclaims Kieu: 'Why! were not the tombs today made clean?
Yet here no tending, no oblativè smoke hath been! Can such
prevail?'

At that Vuong-Quan unfolds from first to last this tale:
'Dam-Tien, a courtesan and lauded nightingale of yore,
lies there,
Renowned a span for graces free and debonair —
No lack of orioles and swallow-flights of fair youths found
that door!

65 But beauty's prospects ever garner meagre store:
Mid-May the blooming branch that such sweet
perfumes bore—abrupt was rent.
One came to call, in distant climes a resident,
Who yon had heard the lady's fame, now thought to venture
her delights.

But as the suitor from his bark her strand first sights
70 E'en then the pin hath snapped, the vase with sharded mites
bestars the floor,
The chill of chantries to the dead of heretofore
Enfolds her courts, and prints of hoof and wheel,
moss-o'erlaid, grow now faint.

- "What mystifying thing is this!" resounds his plaint,
"Sure some opprobrious god this rendezvous hath tainted! ...
 But mark! though,
- 75 Predestination—karma—notwithstanding, lo!
Our union in another life, let heaven know, I here attest!"
He bought a casket, carried her bewept to rest
By jewelled wain . . . Yet wreaths but briefly graced yond
 crest of heaped red dust.
- The lunar hare hath sought its cove since that gale's gust,
80 The sun's crow plunged—how oft? None notes the grave nor
 musters due lament.'
- From Kieu's responsive heart a ready dole gives vent,
Interrogating fate and, first, fate's unattentive God-of-all:
'O wayward, O perverse be woman's antient thrall;
These sagas of misfortune echo themes appalling to our kind;
- 85 Say, Great Creator, must blights ever bud-days find
To blast spring verdancy? frosts render soon
 repined the summer's rouse?
Alive, she took the very world for lusty spouse;
Alas, where be the beaux of old, to call love-dousing death
 a sham,
Who once cock-phoenix-like attended on Madame?
- 90 Where be the bards to cherish fresh that face,
 enamoured of its rose,
Their lyred recall before oblivion interpose?
Gone—then shall I this incense light in lieu of those; and too
 in point
Of venerating token for this chance conjoint;
It may be those that 'neath the Yellow Springs anointed lie
 can know.'
- 95 She whispers soft a prayer and makes discreet *kou-tou*,
Strews herb about the grave, then backs with
 movements slow and musing mind.

- As on that withered sward the shadows grew long-lined
And under nearby banks blurred grey and undefined
the fluvial cane,
Withdrew Kieu forth a hairpin from her late-dressed mane,
100 And on a tree effusions strange by Duong-quatrains and
stopped-rhyme scribed:
Old haunting imagery that youth and dreaming gibed,
Induced by brutal doubts her soul had new-imbibed
and hence must heed,
And blanched her floral features from that novel need,
While consternation welled unchecked, now borne
on beaded drops, now streams ...
- 105 Speaks Vân, perturbed: 'O sister mine, it pity seems
To thus misspend thy tears in mourning lost esteems
and long-dead days ...'
But Kieu: 'Doth not the classic rose incur essays
Of spoil and virulence as never overlays the eglantine?
Do I but ponder on such metaphors I pine,
110 And call to yond sunk dust: Then time to this decline
distinction brings?'
Thus Quan: 'O worthy sister, strange that language rings;
To so deflect upon thyself such jarring things offends the ear;
The dreary air grows burdensomely heavy here
And darkness stoops; the homeward path a fraught
arrear of time entails ...'
- 115 Still Kieu replies: 'When those of talented avails
Pass on, their bodies only die, their soul-pareils
unbound abide;
Who knows but sympathies 'twixt us and such ghosts glide:
Remain, for haply these surrounds will yet provide
some mystic deed!'
Ere word in answer might the others intercede,
120 Blasts wake the ragged flags on that funereal mead to flared
display,

Blow turbulent torn leaves in bosky disarray,
And leave wee wafts of delicatest perfume playing in the air!
The three to leeward of the grave are driven, where
They see now, clear-impressed, the print of slippers
 there upon the moss!

125 Then does great awe from face to pallid face crisscross!
Thus Kieu: 'Now verily the otherworld of Joss
 envigours near,
And sure this apprehending heart hath found its peer!
The offices that rule our lives and deaths are here:
 two kin are we,
Whose souls so manifest their suit for all to see!'

130 She cut a sign of sisterhood on yonder tree of first entail
With that calligraphy of exquisite travail:
A dithyrambic ode it was, in parting hail to virgin joys.

III

To stay or steal away? While yet their motions poise,
Soft harness-music, filigrees of chiming noise, draws near.

They turn,

135 And in mid-distance seem some scholar to discern.

Unruled, his horse selects its path, while, nowise stern,
the horseman beams.

His poet's sack hangs stuffed with cheery blends of dreams
Distilled of winds and moonlight, nigh the hooves thick
teems a throng of lads

Who make bucolic din ... And snow the strong colt clads,
140 And azure skies the rider robe, that hill-greens gladsomely
encroach ...

The traveller completes his amiable approach,
Dismounts and courtly greets the halted three, to broach
their concourse drawn,

And as his splendid slippers tread the mediate lawn,
The scene is silk-roll parklands when a ruby dawn adorns
each shoot,

145 With Quan, who knows that face, advancing to salute,
While screened by fronds the fair ones timidly recruit a grace
demure.

~

The young man's name and marks were by no means
obscure:

Kim-Trong, whose clan-chignon bore learning's vestiture
of brooch and snood,
The scion of country-rich and gifted brood.
150 Kim's literary genesis had long accrued on tombs of kin,
But for his erudition, graces, skills—therein
The gain was his. A lad, though, past where whims begin,
of restless slant,
Become now to these parts bard-circumambulant
Since both young Quan and he had lately left pedantic lore's
high road.
155 There had been talk, to tantalise and then to goad,
Of vernal beauties twain—though far their bird-abode of
fabled brass,
In tramontane remove their needle-room, alas!
Kim often musing dreamy-eyed their faint and passing forms
had sought—
And now to meet like this in settings unforesight,
160 In times of daylong gay leaf-hunts and posies wrought and
love-caps weaved!
Blooms yon an orchid!—one girl glimpsed is so perceived.
A fall-chrysanthemum blows there—as fair! ... Believed he
lived two such?
Yet—one excels ... She—Kieu—is touched too by
awe's touch;
Twin intuitions freely leap—though fright as much quick
ward constrains,
165 And they know not if heed or dream the greater gains,
And only that each moment now confounds, yet pains
the act of tear!

The day dispels its final deliquescent flare.
The young man mounts; she, staying, ventures him a wary
sideways peep ...
Below the bridge last shimmers overlies the deep,
170 And bending by one bank a willow hangs its creeping trail
of silk ...

IV

Returns Kieu to the florid curtains of her ilk.
The sunk sun's ardent douse has drained, shows pale
 the Milky Way; drums drum
The moon's bright rise, its spreading rays through casements
 come,
Gild ponds and, under boughs the last eve-zephyrs
 thrum, make pied the ground.
175 Soon, by the neighbour wall, tea-flowers bend, rebound,
Where dropping dew from higher sprays frail, nether-
 founded species stir.
 Kieu, silent, lone, regards the moon, and thus in her
The recent bustle on the road and earlier emotions mix:
'So, flaunt your frills ye fair; cold time attends those tricks:
180 A spring of splendour turns to rotting faggot sticks encased
 in clay!
And he, just met—what looms pursuant on this day:
The ever-lauded hundred-years-of-heaven, pray? ...
 How shall this end?'
About her troubled mind a hundred flows contend,
And vaguely conjured in those drifts old verses wend a child's
 refrain:
185 How once a moonbeam sought through bamboo-weave
 a lane ...

She sits there couched beside a balustrade, entraining
 reverie,
When lo! a vision of weird beauty seems to see.
In shining aspects delicate and light a she-shade comes
 arrayed,
With dew-washed face, snow-maiden's form and,
 part displayed,
190 Such feet as kindle myth—each step a lotus laid!
 A pause intense
Of wonderment yields to Kieu's whispered reverence:
'How strayed you lady from yon Peach-Copse Springs? ...
 came thence? ... from paradise?'
The bland reply: 'Our hymn of souls was that device;
We joined in consonance so fitly once, may twice not please
 again?
195 My home of clay lies by, where meets the west-champaign
With heaven's edge. Nigh runs a rill, there rapids strain,
 a bridge stands arc'd.
Mild murmurs sounded down, and waking me I harked
To courtesies affecting more than memoirs marked in salient
 gold.
But list: thy name—thus hath my god-familiar told—
200 Is writ among the League of those who must enfold
 egregious care—
Whose very entrails shall be torn! Yet thou must bear
What karma bids, as I—for we comprise a pair by kind—do
 too.
The *Rime of Ten Fleet Joys* our god bids thee new-do,
That by thy pencraft's paraphrase thine own fate's
 due be ratified.'
205 Ten woes that once ten happy maidens did betide! ...
Kieu sighs, obeys, the covenant with one sylph-glide of hand
 records
And offers to Dam-Tien—who golden words awards:

'When works displayed in ranked repute are praised, which
 lords of art have wrought,
Or mourned are tragic tales of beauties sorrow-brought,
210 This script shall chronicle thy questings, strife unsought and
 stillness won!'
 The visitor descends the perron: she has done
And leaves, light-slipped. Kieu would keep her transience
 mundane yet, to know
More lore; but now a night-gust gives the blind a blow,
And she to sentient sight returns—to seek the strowments
 of a dream
215 In troughs of space that even now prefigured seem
With shape, and still some remnant scent of rich
 esteem appear to keep.
 And now great perturbation nullifies all sleep,
While mulls she life and fate, and feels night's torpid creep,
 dawn's lurking chill.
So, then, a leaf of duckweed, drifting at flood's will,
220 Must be her lot: tossed, yet pre-set; storm-driven,
 still in fate's arrest!
Then spasms of self-pity daze her, and oppressed
By strange and dreadful images she sobs with
 breast-born fitful tears.

Kieu's plaint invades her mother's phoenix-drapes: appears
The woken dame from lily banks of youth-sunned years and
 dream-sweet herb.
225 'Why restive so,' she scolds, 'day's dawning to disturb,
Thy cheeks like dank pear petals quivering to curb the
 marring rain?'
Thus Kieu's reply: 'O low, uncouth, her parent's bane,
Must prove this child, who granted birth and nurture's gain
 shall leave unpaid
That double debt! The place where dead Dam-Tien is laid

- 230 We visited today, and, as I slept now, made she to me
 straight,
To speak of Sorrow's Clan, its charter's awful freight,
And charged me world-abjuring texts to brush: here,
 late-done, lies that end!
I must believe these dread phenomena portend
Your daughter's days shall wretched be, nor will she render
 filial worth.'
- 235 The matron rails: 'Delusions! Dreams! ... Untouched
 by dearth
A-marketing she goes for banes to poison mirth! ... Forbear!
 Be firm!'
Kieu yields to precepts and appeals—but for a term:
For brooding by the Tuong soon swells its flood to
 bermal overflow ...
 Outside the mullions golden orioles make low
- 240 Pre-dawning purl; the last night-air's' soft catkin-strow
 on roofs descends;
The moon's decline pavilion, girl in darkness blends;
And in that lull, alone, she bows forlorn and tends her
 thoughts in grief.

V

That lovers roost in tangled brakes is hoar belief:
 No sage the silken ligature which binds love's sheaf of thorns
 untwines!

245 Our Kim since turning to his study-casements pines,
 And thinking on gone Kieu descries no anodynes,
 nor can dismay

Or trouble settling on his breast by bushels stay.
 Three winters gathered into one unending day her lack
 entails,

While keep a cloud-like secrecy her window veils—

250 Or do his fancies shape an image there that hails him, taunts
 him yet?
 Since that first eve a month of midnight lamps
 has set:

Her face through light and shadow fleets—anew is met,
 anew eludes.

His study-room, untended, copper cold exudes,
 Hare-bristle brushes stiffen, slack strings sound
 no moods of arcady

255 And sag on frets. The *tuang*-cane screen swings
 squall-blown, free;

No incense but weaves whimsies now, nor fragrant tea
 the tongue delights . . .

Kim cries: 'Sure karma's three-lives-writ our union cites,

Or wherefore tenants in my bastioned heart these nights her
countenance?'
With longing he relives that scene, restores her stance
260 As then she stood ... then to that weald of blessed
chance he makes return.
And dark-green bides the grass thereat beside the burn,
And crystal run its singing waters still ... but yearning brings
no she.
The sighing evening wind abets sad reverie,
Or bends the reeds in mocking gestures ... until he,
wan-visaged, goes.
265 Thus does scant ground sustain a multitude of woes.

Yet Kim shall cross the Vault-Blue Bridge to win
through throes the Nymph of old!
Close-hemmed the Vuong maintain their seat,
dour-walled their fold:
No stream to float a rose-leaf script, no tidings told by
bard-birds there ...
Within, a willow droops its silken curtain spare,
270 A cage-like zone for some hid oriole's uncaring,
happy song ...
The portal-gate might keep a fort forever strong ...
Do not those balusters, cascading blooms, prolong
her rooms, perchance? ...
For one agued hour Kim rocks in vacillating trance,
Then by and by, beyond, he spies another manse in
silhouette:
275 The house of one, he knows, long gone to Ngô or Viet
For venture-trade and in his absence to be let.
O heaven-sent!
Kim comes (a roving scholar) presently to rent,
Obtains the lease and transfers with his complement of lute
and books.
The garden-suite of rock and dwarf trees seemly looks—

- 280 But—*Lam-Thuy*!—thus bespeaks a plaque its nether nooks—
 'Kingfisher Views'!
 Ah, *Thuy*—what joy that he this lucky close should choose:
 A sign, forsooth, their lives a thrice-told-fate will fuse
 in certain bond!
- A pane of paper lifts unlimed one wing ... beyond,
 Deploys her orient wall. Kim daily stoops in fond spy's crane,
 back bowed;
- 285 But never cast or stir or tincture is allowed
 Of Peach Springs' grotto-dwelling Sprite, rose-glow
 endowed, of ancient ode ...
 Since taking post in his equivocal abode
 Kim marks the moon ascending on her month's grand road
 a second round—
 And now in night-warm shades, beyond the garden-bound,
- 290 A slender shape efforms beneath the fronds, stands
 soundless, latent, dim.
 Lute dropped, he grabs his gown and to the median brim
 Bounds forth! ... A fragrance lingers yet, but where the trim
 wraith was ... is air.
 Kim follows close the plant-damascened wall to where
 Upon a reaching peach-branch gleams, moon-caught,
 a hairpin's cupro-gold.
- 295 He stretches over ... then draws back; then—gesture bold—
 He plucks it in! 'Now here some spangled lady strolled.
 What else,' he thinks,
 'But that this lovely trinket tells of yon screened minx—
 And could it but that she and I had mystic links else
 grace my hand?'
- He dotes on it, imagining while runs night's sand
- 300 That some sweet-spicy unction lingers faint and bland about
 that pin.
 When dew-dispersing dawn has passed,
 a shape within

The next-door bourn starts forth, appearing to begin
a toilsome search ...

Our student waits; then from a hidden ready perch
He casts his voice athwart the wall to test the nurture of her
heart:

305 'Most quaintly to my net doth fate this pin impart;
Would that I knew where Hop-Phô pearlers trade, to barter
there this gem ...'

From yonder side wry tones of banter Kim condemn:
'Those honest gentlemen most garner who contemn found
goods to keep:

A hairpin kept must scarce such satisfaction reap
310 As straight return, in those whose breeding measures cheap
ill-gotten wealth.'

Kim braver grows: 'We come and go as if by stealth
In this shared neighbourhood, and forfeit thus the healthful
cheer of friends.

I longed to breathe again that scent which here now wends,
But found that fate slow sequel after tasting sends to souls
in fast.

315 Despondent voids my waiting spanned ... Yet here,
at last ...

Wouldst ease my heart? ... Delay, I beg, that I may cast thee
thoughts none shown!

He skips inside, and to the pin adds of his own
Gold bangles gleaming two upon a kerchief sewn with silk
to boot,

Then on a ladder fit to grapple heaven's root
320 He mounts the wall ... The very girl!—no fold unfluted,
foot agley

(Withal confused and bashful she, as on that day).
Kim studies her with frontal gaze (she turns away
her blushing face)

Then speaks: 'Since first I saw thee walk that happy place

A second glimpse I yearned for; but, denied, apace I lorn
became,
325 And meagre grew to this dull fellow's mien and frame ...
Yet, bide: for thy blest advent will that life inflame which
waiting spent
When my poor questing spirits to Cloud Palace went,
Or haggard clung I to the Bridge of Hopes while bent above
woe's wave ...
I come now, failing, for the balm those dolours crave:
330 Vouchsafe, benign bright river, that thy waters lave this long-
drouthed fern! ...'
Kieu hears, with wonder held, then makes this
soft return:
'The customs of my house are simple as hibernal ice,
and stark:
Our parents deem—though tempts to rove love's rose-leaf
bark,
And gods or poets spin its stays—a child must hearken to
kin-choice.
335 Spare then this willow-shoot, weak dame of little voice,
Whose rash assent should her unmerited rejoicing
render vain.'
Kim presses: 'Zephyrs come today; tomorrow, rain:
Shall fickle springtime offer halcyon gifts again as these we
see?
Do meditate upon my fervour, whose degree,
340 Undone, must mar all love, impair philanthropy, dull mercy's
ken ...
Some simple sign of concourse I solicit then,
Of sympathy, and I will seek my suit by tenured
go-between ...
But if the Sacred Wheel of Days should supervene
And overturn my hopes—why, let all springs, and e'en great
nature, run

345 To grey aridity! This morning will have done
For aye a life whose dawn had seen so soon its sun in ashes
set!

Long thus she listened, cradled in his phrases' net,
While spring's sweet sways, but, too, autumnal prompts
of threat, invoked their guise,
Then spoke: 'Though fair, thy words call chimeras to rise;
350 Yet, gladness-girt, a guileless maid shall curbs devise for her
unease.

To thee I cede my pledge and so two souls appease:
A pledge made—heed!— for bronze memorials, marble
friezes, not in jest!

These words as if a knot unloosed inside Kim's breast,
He raised the gold adornments in their kerchiefed nest,
and vowed this vow:

355 'Let five-score years in blessed bond succeed from now,
And may these tokens witness serve and be fore-dowry
to our pledge!'

Kieu bore a ribbon and a fan whose scalloped edge
A sunflower formed: with these the girl restored the ledger
for her pin.

Those rites of grave entrustment, lo! here foundered in
360 Alarm—for now the young ones heard some sudden
din beyond the roofs,
And tumbling leaves and trampled blooms left jumbled
proofs
Of flight: he to his books, she to the paints and pouffes
of womens' rooms! . . .

~

Since then, like ore whose worth the touchstone-stroke
exhumes,

Their love grows richer, deeper-loded, all-subsumes the clay
possessed:

365 The river Tuong, slight band and shallow to foot's test,
Now laps the twain: one claims its heights, one on some
crestless reach sits down ...

A range stands raised between their lands, of mists its crown,
Frosts fringe it, yet endearments echo love's renown on either
side ...

Glide days and nights, on winds and moonlight borne
they tide,

370 And what grew green engoldens with the never-biding
spring's decline,

And falls a birthday-feast in Kieu's maternal line,
That calls her parents and to tend them while they dine the
youngest two.

With lively glee the four their festal robes renew,
Then troop away with gifts beseeching their milieu and high
in heart.

375 Kieu's thoughts beyond the silent orchids too depart,
And suddenly she thinks, this day may lend to chart
new fields of chance—

She too shall visit! ... First-flush fruitery plaisance
And orchard-arbour yield her: artless gift and handsel both.

The wall

Is nigh, on lotus feet she lifts to softly call—

380 And through its topmost vines sees Kim in wait,
a-sprawl beneath some sprays ...

Begins their game. He chides: 'Thus ends love's fickle blaze!
The soon-dead incense privy to our vow portrays, alas, that
wane:

Morns filled with hope of thee decanted dole again
Each eve, while I, lorn, measured by thy cruel abstaining
empty days.'

- 385 And Kieu grieves thus: 'Winds caught and baulked me, rains'
delays
Endured, and so submitted I, my friend, to ways that
used thee ill.
But now: an empty house ... the clime and time stand still ...
And in all cheer I come this radiant day to willingly
make mend!
Past brush and rock array the wall's secluded end
- 390 Conceals a new collapse, where rough-laid beams extend
across the breach—
Kim heaves ... and bares to both the Palace of the Peach!
Broad-parted clouds disclose wherewith may mortals reach
the gods' abode!
Bright face reflects bright face, each glance a diamond lode,
Each speech a treasury of courtesies bestowed and paid back
so;
- 395 And while they, Kim-led, gain his reading-portico,
Fresh vows of faith they vouch, wind-witnessed, in escrow
to hills, to streams ...
- His desk bears brush-racks, scattered scripts; on shelves verse
reams
Cram copper tubes; a pale-green sketch of firs redeems one
barren wall:
A copse some strokes have fixed in drifts of misty pall ...
- 400 Kieu whispers praise: 'How well those silent pines recall one's
eyes to look!'
The student thus: 'A daub I lately undertook,
Do add some words of kind descant ... 'twould aid one
brook its artlessness.'
Her nymph's hand floats—and leaves strange sentiments that
dress
Anew that scene: hid winds and thunders would egress!
so warn her whorls ...

- 405 Kim murmurs, awed: 'A skill to conjure jade and pearls!
Why, those famed scholars Ban and Ta but country girls
would judged here be! ...
And sure, lives past, we earned this glad conformity,
Where such delight as mine and art as this agree so
even-weighed?'
- But she: 'When these uprisen eyes to thee first strayed,
410 They saw a scholar from the Golden Door, a jade-hung
noble bold,
While frail as new-winged dragonflies I felt unfold
My days—how poised to cast, the Great Celestial Mould ...
hap round, hap square?
I mind at five, when parents girls for life prepare,
A seer perused my features, reading written there this
latency:
- 415 "Her quintessential light will blaze a span, then she
Shall know ten-thousandfold intemperativity to blight
her gifts!"
I look upon thy furnishings and fear fate lifts
In mischief, not in gain for thee, such chanceful drifts
of debile stuff.'
- But Kim: 'We met by heaven's deem: that speaks enough,
420 And man till now hath ever found the ways of bluffing fate
to turn,
I scorn what might some day contest our bond; I spurn
Forebodings—fearless, I commit my unconcern to bronze
and stone!'
- No facet of their secret selves remains unknown,
While soar extravagant young hearts, ring toasts
high-flown, drams overflow ...
425 But happy hours are ever fugitive, we know;
Without, the raven has concealed day's glass below
the western hills,

And Kieu's void house, long silent left, unease instils:
She takes her leave. Yet when but back behind the grilles
 and crêpe de Chine,
One knocks, a courier from the Vuong with word serene:
430 The dazzling banquet quickens to its peak, they mean
 to revel more!
Again she flies the silk-hung coving of her door,
To weave and waver, now alone, on felt ways for her footed
 sense,
By glinting leaves and underdarkness grown more dense,
Towards where flecks like glow-worms broach the pores
 of stencilled study-screens.
435 Kim sits and dozes, braced against his desk he leans
In pleasant torpor. Pastoral, dream-nascent scenes a visitant
Seem now to send: a sylph by yond pagoda-plant—
Who, pear-bud, whiter than the moon, bids fair to grant
 herself to hand!
Sure Giap's cloud-trysts of story urge him take that bland
440 And ready nymph? ... such fancies summer trances pander
 when they might!
Kieu, nearing, chides, her eyes grown merry
 in the light:
'Asleep?—while one thee seeks in emptiness and night?
 Dream-whelmed?—belike
My happy glances too, which with such credence strike
Thy face, see not thee but, moon-lulled, on some
 dream-icon look in lieu? ...'
445 With awkward joy Kim stands to proffer her fair
 due ...
To charge again the floret-bossed brass lamp, renew
 the incense pan ...
But, gravely now, they pen fidelity's great plan,
To which a lock from Kieu is pared by tender-handled clip
 of knife;

- Then moonwards, to the stars, prolific grown and rife,
450 Two voices harmonised and firm one seamless life for
 aye declare! ...
 The vow-rite settled to its utmost thread and hair,
Might someone still their hundred years of blessings dare
 deny? ... dispute?
More amber bowls brim love's bright-porphyrus salute,
While lap their shadows on the screens, and meld in
 mute conflows, and clear ...
- 455 Yet Kim still sighs: 'The breeze blows fresh, the moon glows
 sheer,
One thing my soul, though to completeness come thus near,
 hath yet not found;
But, begging it—the pestle still the draft to pound
That couples quaff before they cross Blue Bridge—
 might sound impertinent ...'
Kieu thus: 'Silk thread and floating cipher-leaf fate sent
460 To twine and teach our wills that hence to one intent they
 bide inclined:
Let those gird words with moons before and blooms behind
Who plead apart—could love against itself be minded, aught
 refuse?'
This his request: 'Thy lutist-feats are ever news:
'Tis said Chung-Ky read souls by sound of such a muse ...
 Do play for me ...'
465 'A humble talent, mine, scarce worth such praise,' says she,
'But when true hearts invoke a claim it must be heeded,
 promptly served!'
Inside the hall Kim's pleasant lute hangs, crescent-curved:
He tenders it with offertory stoop observed, palms
 raised to brows.
Kieu yet protests: 'I never played for public bows
470 But private sport, and fear thy fretting when I rouse
 an artless din ...'

And speaking she adjusts each string from thick to thin,
Until the foursome five-tone-tuned disparts, as in a
choir arrayed.

Then, first, 'The Battle of the Han and So' she played:
An iron clamour of chromatic chords conveyed that brutal
war;

475 And then Tu-Ma's 'The Phoenix Seeks His Paramour':
A peal that none who heard might doubt the grieving
nor the raging tongue;

Then came the wise, ill-starred and slain Ke-Khang's 'Quang-
Lang':

Evoking restless seas beneath a black scud-strung empyrean;
Last, 'Frontier Crossing': which bewept poor pawned Chieu-
Quân,

480 Part pining for her lord, part grieving her long ban from
kin-domains—
Tones keen and clear, like passage-cries from high-flown
cranes;

Then hushed to tiding sighs from distant freshet plains
or ocean shores;

Or breathing like a softly pressing wind on moors;
Then, rapid beats a-drumming down inverted stores
of drubbing rain ...

485 The lamp-flame flickered bright, grew dim then flared
again,

Revealing in the student's attitude of painful reverie—
Head bowed, pressed on a palm his chin, arm propped
on knee—

One who had learnt that hour new sensibility. Said he,
quaked-brow:

'Aye, artistry here be; a plenitude enow—

490 But for those apprehending these grave humours, how like
gall each draft!

Why choose such cheerless themes and so despond thy craft,
 To agitate thine own bright soul and leave grieved after those
 who hear?'

Kieu bent: 'A failing, true, that doth unbid appear,
 Or haply heaven sends the restless and the queer of
 every sort;

495 But thine are providential words of rich import,
 And I, if time so grants, this girlish and abortive fault
 shall mend.'

A fragrant bud will tempt the hand to soon extend,
 And to such burgeoning does now their courtship tend
 as threatens deed;

Until in lulls when crescent passions part recede
 500 It seems to Kieu the next gain might abandon heed
 and prove too free;

So that: 'Lest we should trip in careless play,' begs she,
 'Draw we apart, that I might speak a thought proceeding
 from unease,

Though it—slight plant obtruding notice—may displease:
 No walls bar jays when gardens bloom, nor love in season
 is forborne,

505 But now, before I don the badge of hemp and thorn—
 A wife's *tao*-seal—florescent chastity's adornment should
 be mine.

Ought we in wanton groves of mulberries recline,
 Like jades and satyrs who by Boc's bounds riverine anarchic
 live?

Or snatch half-ripe the fruit that spring-months vagrants give?

510 May we for brief delight centennial marriage shiver
 in its van?

Consider ancient trystings rare, 'twixt maid and man:
 The ardent Thôi and Truong—what couple could
 or can with such equate?

Yet hasty passion, palling, made their love to bate:

The songs of swift and oriole became but prating, stale
at last,
515 So that while wing yet covered wing and limbs knit fast,
Heart's hold had spent its keeping, now commitment passed
elsewhere bestowed.
Alas, their haste-lit nuptial censer flared, not glowed,
Then like the temple of their vow, the Tây Pagoda,
cold became.
A weaver will preserve her virtue's little fame—
520 Should we do less, and ever bear a ribald name for one wild
hour?
Why haste the stars? The willow bends, so blooms
the flower,
And seasonal delays will garland more our bower
in recompense.
Such timely truths Kim hears expressed
with diffidence,
That tenfold grows, while Kieu declaims, his
reverence towards the maid.

VI

525 As morning-silver shines through night's grown gauzy shade,
A sudden hail is heard! Beneath the gate-estrate one
seeks ingress.

Kieu gains her female courts with tremulous express,
While Kim directs himself—perturbed, companionless—
across the yard

Of alcoved plums to clear the entryway, night-barred.

530 He finds a young retainer-kin come ridden hard with
this text scrolled:

An uncle late has joined in rest with forebears old,
And unattended now he lies, unburied, cold, without
due dirge:

To far Lieu-Duong, across high range and gorge-fed surge,
The Lofty Cedar, father to Kim's clan, now urges him depart,

535 Those obsequies to take in hand . . . Immediate start!

Kim sways in shock—then, more restrained,
construes a chart to Kieu's rouge-shelf

To reckon with her how this will hurt her and himself

(A grieved house well may bid one leave love, fame and self
on such a char).

Thus he: 'We hardly spoke—now breadths will more speech
bar!

540 The fates contrived to spin their hymen thread, yet mar
what it would tie!

The moon which heard our vows we henceforth must descry
From lands a thousand *li* apart—will our thoughts hie too to
new ways?
For me, each hour from thee shall seem akin decays
Of winters three, spent carding dreary endless days
of tangled care!
545 O swear thou'lt guard our love like gold and gems ...
new-swear,
That nightly hence where furthest sinks the cloud-coped air
I might know rest!
Kieu's ears snare sentences that tight-ensnarl her
breast,
And from her great dismay at last she makes sore-wrested
this reply:
'Why turns the hymen-god thus hostile from us? ... why?
550 And wherefore we nigh-bound by his anointed tie must now
disband? ...
Yet, I with thee have sworn a mighty oath and grand—
Let strength fail, fairness fade, my soul to first-told candours
shall adhere,
Though tested by the pass of year and sequent year!
Be blithe. Though vex thee thy drenched couch, cold desert-
cheer, the sea's salt blast,
555 Know, I stay thine. Can love so absolute, bronze-cast,
Concede some swain might tempt me tune a lute at last
in his canoe?
While mountains, waters, coursing days endure, so too
Will constancy, and hope for thy return imbue this beating
heart!
They stand deferring, loath to let their fingers part;
560 Then as the noon sun poises on its westward start above the
tiles
Hands loosen, Kim to face his many-omened miles,
While reverencing tears and lachrymose last smiles yet tell
Kieu's dole.

He mounts his horse, his servant clasps the baggage-pole,
Their epic parts: he leaves her long-quiescent, sole,
 where roads divide.

565 Grey grow the lands of strangers, sadder with each stride.
Here, swamp-hens in the bracken brood; there, singly glide
 where dim the plains
Small distant swifts. Through vast, inert, unkind domains
Shall trek Kim, burdened by unease and heart's arraigns,
 each dawn new-weighed ...

VII

The girl stood braced against a western balustrade,
570 And all the pain of nine plague epochs moments bade in that
 mute pose.
Abroad, through latticed ports pre-prandial smoke-rings
 rose,
While nearer by a willow limbed in sallow hose a
 gust-borne bloom
Gyred randomly. She sought a tranquil inner room,
Where soon, from shires-maternal come, her romping-
 humoured kin made bound.
575 Scarce hear those their own hails upon themselves
 soft sound,
When hell flings in from every door! ... the yamen's
 houndlike, baying band! ...
Guards, grooms, with yard-long staves and
 scimitars in hand! ...
Bull-headed, horse-faced, fired for havoc—where they land
 there doom is done!
They thrust neck-stocks upon the old man and his son,
580 And for good measure truss the helpless pair with one
 constrictive thong!
They foray through the house like flies, and where their
 throng

Makes noisy swarm and passes—shambles!—looms tipped,
 long-toiled work a wrack
And wholesale plunder of fine things and bric-a-brac,
Till every pocket strains its stitches, placket, sack,
 exceeds its vent! ...

585 Whence had calamity thus winged? By whose intent?
Whose plot had plaited such a pot for shrimp, snapped pent
 so smart a snare?

The reaved Vuong delved abroad to plumb
 the mean affair ...

It stemmed from libels by some hopeless wretch out
 there who sold silk flock!

The house succumbed to stunned paralysis en bloc ...

590 Then trance to wailing turned—this wicked wrong will rock
 the pillared sky! ...

A day of noisy pleas and countless bows passed by:
Deaf dwelt compassion's ear; mute, lips that might decry
 barbarities—

They hung the victims by their heels from rafter trees!

A statue might have quaked with dread set down where
 these two souls were flayed,

595 Have laughed or cried at that procedural charade ...

The gods stood distant in those days, and prayers for aid,
 appeals to draw

High heed, unanswered went: earth's wardens of the law

Still wreaked at will their ribald rapes—brutes, vast in crow,
 in virtue naught!

How now to save familial flesh, is Kieu's grim thought,

600 For when bane falls on breed and tribe, all fend: son,
 daughter, man and mite.

But—pull two fealties! ... There, late, to Kim her plight;

Here, holy dues to parenthood—whose moans indict
 a longer wait! ...

Wave-witnessed vows yet echoed by the hills abate—
For, given life, a child's repayment from that date holds
paramount,
605 And now the girl must meet that capital account ...
'Desist!—' she cries, 'and in their place take me for bounty
to be sold!'

One there who from the Chung clan hailed, a scribe and old
And kindly, though with those the yamen had
enrolled among its crew,
Perceived what filial probity would dear undo,
610 And, drawn to help, suggested methods to pursue the rueful
trade:
The Young were shown what shifts and wormings might be
made,
But, chief, should they ensure three hundred *lang* were paid,
the stir would still—
The pair could bide in his preserve by sigilled bill,
While men of ready means might bid for Kieu until the deal
were done ...
615 So young and artless yet, to find how life may run
Into such punitive and gale-like, sudden-stunning blows of
fate
As, instantly, love, all, to naught can arrogate!
But, there—love dies; it yields when life does, soon or late:
what serves regrets?
Should raindrops transience grieve? Their doom the
grass begets.
620 Or, then, grass mourn its three-months' growth that barely
lets bow thanks to spring?
Thus Kieu weighs worlds, while go-betweenes of
purses sing,
And scurry round to propagate their brokering abroad and
wide ...
Till, soon, from rimlands come, a panting crone is spied,

- A-towing close some stranger, pleased to make a bride
of Kieu the maid.
- 625 'Ma—Scholar ...' he admits to when his name is
prayed.
- His seat? The Lâm-Thanh march ('A step, a promenade,
a sneeze from here ...')
- He sheds the odours of a forty-something year,
Is shaved and salved of face and rendered fair veneer in point
of dress.
- The crone conducts Ma's rowdy lackeys to assess
- 630 The damozel, descending with disgraceful press on Kieu's
retreat,
- While he selects in arbour'd breadths an easy seat
Till they should harry her to him. On quaking feet, from her
boudoir
- She shows. Kin-cares, her own fate, now crepuscular,
Oppress her steps towards Ma's form, first seen afar through
fonting tears.
- 635 Unsure and awed, a creature of unworldly fears,
She flushes, pales, shrinks back ... while yon the rabble leers,
plies ribald lore.
- The more Dame Go-between primps Kieu—pats, prompts—
the more
- Her head declines ... as daisies drouthed, or frosted floret-
apricots.
- They weigh her pithy points (set, cut, *ton*, tricks) by lots,
- 640 Demand she pluck the moon-backed lute, berhyme 'bon-
mots' upon a fan ...
- While conning Kieu among the commerce sweats our man.
He now proceeds well-satisfied to make the pander
dulcet speech:
- 'Such jade no seekers but by crossing Blue Bridge reach:
Pray tell, what toll in bridal recompense might breach the
passage yon?'

645 'A thousand gold!' the broker cries, '... or near upon:
For sure her luckless kin would rest her value on your
honour's heart.'
Beat down here two, beat up there one, the pair make mart,
Until the sale is settled at (defrays apart) the needed *lang*.
The see-saw sway desists: route set and oars outslung
650 The bride-bark waits, the two nativities among sage elders
course
To cast the day for nuptial gird and parents' bourse—
When cash in cumberbund augments blood's tidal force, what
might not be!
A sign to Mr. Chung, and now, sub-judice
Upon that just factotum's supplication, free the Vuong
go home.

~

655 The father stood once more in his familial dome,
Eyed Kieu, and knew how hearts can shrivel, blood
wry-roam, intestines parch!
'I raised a daughter, garland to my seasons' march ...'
He moaned, 'a gentle girl, who would from her high
arch a bauble throw
Upon a swain some day. And now this horrid blow;
660 These fiends that cast their enmity on us, and low things that
defame ...
But better that the axe should hew this failing frame
Than youth be sacrificed prolonging age's name ... In vain
intent,
When time sees such durations in a moment spent!
Far rather that this racked life break than she be bent
to further pain!'
665 And as he spoke, his eyes like fountains ran amain,
Until, ebb'd soul, he would have dashed his fevered
brain against a wall,

Had not those near restrained and tended him withal!
Then Kieu sought gentle, soothing strains that might
enthrall distraught old Vuong:
'What value's in these rosy cheeks? They're not for long.
670 And were I to do else the gift of birth I'd wrong, of blood
and name:
A sin that Oanh—who for her tribe braved thrones—should
shame;
And Li, who sold herself—can daughters flout her fame by
zeal less sure?
Though cedars, bent by years as cranes they say endure,
On gnarled old shoulders may sustain young fronds secure
in myriad count,
675 Yet still some floribundant boughs must needs dismount,
That winds and rain should not on too-paternal bounty
havoc wreak.
So too men frugally pluck slips which render weak
Or bear redundant blooms, that parent-stems might
eke new green again—
By which some merit those culled issues yet attain.
680 Think then all this as if a bud remote from stain had lapsed
unblown,
And let parental tears not temper this well-known
To children social truth: What hazardeth one's own, imperils
one.'
The ancient's throes appeared assuaged when Kieu
had done,
But oft his thoughts that put-on cheer would overrun,
his tears gainsay ...
685 Events now gather pace with Ma's prescribed entree,
The bloom-bossed deed is signed, the weighed and toted
payment transfers hands ...
O heedless moon-god, bearer of the silken bands,

Why keepest thou them ravelled thus, and snarl'st
their strands in knots chance-hap?
And pelf, which through his palms man's abstract
soul can trap,
690 Shall its dark might love's brilliant palaces too sap? ...
It shall—child's play.
Old Chung appealed on their behalf, begged to convey
A humbly-tendered gift, and straight upon that day
the lawsuit ceased.

And whilst Vuong-matters for the bye new life now leased,
Orion's triple points that frame a wedding-feast drew quickly
on.
695 Kieu sits alone beside her lamp with night far gone,
Her bodice wet with tears, locks wry, and inly ponders thus
her pain:
'Comes then with day thy doom; a dawn and yet a wane ...
Go, know from that tomorrow years of self-disdain for thy
false heart!
Ah, sorrow, so unpremised in that hopeful start
700 Of harmony, of unity. Must we then part? ... ne'er more be
whole?
I pledged—then while t'was yet rim-dewed the pledging
bowl,
The words still wet upon the open parchment roll—so soon
to yield!
Now under Lieu's far skies, in lands beyond ken's wield,
Will telling come to Kim of how this hand unsealed our
noble bower?
705 So many credits did our words accrue that hour—
Abused, what dire demerits shall events now shower, what
evils rain?
Yet—still faith's incense glows! I shall be born again,
A steed or kine to serve his sons, a plum-tree fain, or grand
bamboo

Return, to expiate at last my worldly due!
710 Till that rebirth, in Nine Springs' depths a crystal true I shall
 abide ...'
 Thus coursed by surge and drain that sentimental tide
While burned Kieu's lamp; and when at last the oil had dried
 yet ran her tears.

As petals spread so wakes from soft sleep Vân, who nears
To whisper words of sooth from immemorial years: 'When
 heaven deems
715 Sweet meads should sink and salt ooze rise, abstruse yon
 seems:
Such, though—and that a house should set on weak ones
 beams of burden dire
That it endure—is life. Then why this night entire
Hast thou repined? Glows there some other, secret,
 fire of fealty?'
And Kieu: 'Indeed this grief which thus intrudes on thee
720 Is by love's tangled thread provoked; and who can free
 me from its snare?
My lips must tell, e'en though these cheeks with blushes
 flare,
For harbouring the tale might come to seem uncaring
 to one soul.
I would sue things of thee, and if thou'lt heed my dole
Then sit thee here, receive kowtow and hear thine older
 sister speak.
725 Mid-road beneath love's freight the shoulder-yoke
 grew weak:
Unstrung the faithless thong—that thou, thy sister's sequent,
 now must mend,
To bear! Dost hear? ... Since I and lordly Kim did blend
And daily barter sweet conceits—fans pledged in tender,
 wine-bowls shared—

- This sudden brute event tore all: winds wheeled, waves
flared,
730 Incongruent love and duty clashed, left love impaired,
the havoc shows.
But thy spring season, sister, still untroubled blows—
Be thou Kim's wife! Make thy consent to river-flows and
crag now known! ...
And when thy sister's flesh is dust, these bones free-sown,
Nine Springs shall yield her peace that thou by Kieu's
disownment Kieu became! ...
735 This pin of cupro-gold, this cloud-verged page, proclaim
A marriage must ensue: safeguard them, Vân, as same-stead
wedding-ware;
And when long blissful days shall cradle thee from care
Then haply me, by these, thy bosom will still bear and not
forget ...
When I have gone these souvenirs may linger yet:
740 This remnant incense, which wreathed oaths, and this
old fretted friend ... each could,
One day, thy happy home beguile, when sandalwood
To sweeter moods than these might glow, strings sing more
goodly tuned ... And then,
If thou shouldst hear a whisper in the rushes when
Banks windless seem—my spirit from the ghosts of men will
have returned!
745 Aye, even death doth thwart a quietus unearned! ...
Though sedge and willow wane, root-green and undiscerned
they tend the rill ...
Behind the tribune of the night, face hid, voice still,
Know, I shall crave libation's cup, which thou must spill
in sombreness ...
Let fractured pins and scattered mirror-shards address
750 Loves past undone: but mine—though judged now by some
lesser, broken part—

- Mine bides! I shall revere thee, Kim, king of my heart,
A thousand years! ... But what shall span by spinners' art my
thread to thee? ...
- O fate, thou scant and bloodless mask of perfidy,
Must waters flow and fallen blooms relentlessly float down
to rue? ...
- 755 O Kim, lord of my life, I call, my one, to you! ...
But here the matter terminates—this wretch untrue proves
from today!
The flood of words abates: blood-dazed, Kieu swoons away,
Her breath subsides and coldness chills those fingers fey to
ingot brass.
Her parents dull asleep to clamoured waking pass,
- 760 And soon the house swarms concourses of every class, within
and out,
One bearing gruel, another herbs—a grieving rout.
Then forced new tears attest in ebb Kieu's febrile bout:
revives her cheek,
To which they choir: 'What strangeness issues here?—come,
speak!'
But she remultiplies her sobs and to their seeking puts
no pause.
- 765 To Vân befalls the susurrating of the cause:
'This hairpin that ye see ... and on this parchment: clauses to
love's troth ...'
Moans Vuong: '... and then the father made of bliss a broth! ...
But let thy sister Vân in sooth this curse of wrathful fate
allay,
This chaos that our atoms scatters all astray;
- 770 And if thou, child, shouldst now like fern-wort float away or
like a cloud,
Can karma err? Yea, be thy pact with Vân allowed:
Though graven edicts fail, such hests prove god-avowed and
must ensue.'

Kieu bows, then shapes such weak-toned words as doomed
ones do:

'This boon paternal will assure that justice due to
Kim is done.

775 Forget the fate of this fleet-lived, low-valued one,
Who shall not fear if her bones blanch beneath the
sun of some far state.'

~

How ended then that night of woe? The scrolls narrate,
As dawn-drums rolled their final hollow-resonating watch-
divide,

There came all flower-bedecked a retinue outside,
780 Whose tooting flutes and strum of strings now notified the
parting-time.

So, Kieu must leave those dear. Like stars their tears
berime

The sill of stone ... The silk thread wrenches from its primal
home-cocoon ...

Clouds gather darkness overhead that afternoon,
The grass by half-light rises grey, eve-dews drip soon from
fronds and ferns;

785 And now the wedding train towards a tavern turns,
Where Kieu is locked alone, her bounds four walls,
she learns; imprisoned spring

Despairing how it yet to green and rose might cling.
There mulls she ever more tormented thoughts, each
bringing new dismay:

'To heaven's fields, I fear, such men as Ma convey,
790 And naught of raindrops' nacre nor sun's gold see they
but lucre, spoil.

Had I foreseen the sprig must transfer to such soil,

Kim might have plucked it since for coronets to coil
with hale delight,
Have threaded vine through trellis then, that west-wind
night—

When coyness proved custodian to this man's rude right:
a mock to Kim!

795 Once marred, were I some day to treat again with him
Of love, how might deride he—by mine own past prim love's
test—that hope!

But, there—my birth-lot bids me live a hapless mope,
And more than rosy cheeks will vantage me to cope
with that grey life ...!

Upon a tabouret she sees, unsheathed, a knife—
800 A cante of her scarf ... a sigh of secret strife ... and
hid it lies!

'For when ...' she thinks, 'the waters to my shoes should
rise—

And then, ye stars, on use I make of this surmise my further
fate!

A distant sentry-call informs the night grows late,
And Kieu, made dull by stupor and half-dreams, sits waiting
things unknown.

805 She had small notion Ma-the-Scholar was a drone,
A rake whose turbid womanising told the tone of all his past.
Excesses in that life had ravelled him at last
And found him turned to widow-gulling, snapping fast the
smitten mouse!

There reigned one Madame Tu, then, in a bawdyhouse,
810 Whose youth and charms had long dispersed in famed
carousings scarce approached.

One day they met by chance; it was as if uncoached
Two coster-cooks of bitter gourd and sawdust broached each
other's pies ...

They made *ménage* and joined in common enterprise:
While Tu at home coerced the scented merchandise
and turned the trade,
815 Ma trekked to markets and to villages and made
Fantastic promises to teach girls highly paid domestic
trades ...

Some pain to each our numen-ward in heaven lades,
But what was doled to her who waits in midnight shades is
rare travail.
She waits—a shoot of slender strength and prospects frail,
820 A flower trafficked from a bumboat at some sailors' floating
mart,
A silk trace threaded through a weave of shoddy art
To cozen village louts—she waits her lord's imparting fate's
next say.

'I've won the flag and shall parade it as I may! ...'
Ma smiling broods outside, while pleasant choices play
inside his brain,
825 'She's gold! ... such graces in celestial spheres obtain—
Those lips alone would lose an emperor his reign! I make
no boast
That yon jackdandies—nay, the titled ones the most
Of all our honoured guests—will elbow past their host to
pick this dill,
And, presto, there three-hundred *lang* returns their bill
830 And pays my crone her capital. A blink more will see profit
clear.
Still, when so prime a mouthful drifts by one
this near ...
Stay!—curb's a purse for coin ... Yet might not famine here
on windfalls dine?—
That heaven-riven peach dropped on this palm of mine

- But nibbled be? The holy hymeneal sign assents as well! ...
835 And when, beneath these skies, have e'er our clientelle
Of sporting amants, pliers of the yielding belle, a pure bud
known?
Some pomegranate-rind dye, cocks-comb blood,
rouge, thrown
Together, wholesomeness will soon return unblown to parts
it left—
Those dullards in the dark won't miss the bit bereft.
840 Yet, soft—such fumlbers may well overlook a deftly-
physicked loss,
Dame Tu, though, dalliance knows: she'll kindle
vixen-cross! ...
Pish! that's mere straw: a spell stoop-kneed before her bossy
prate soon ends,
While long and melancholy home the highway wends—
And if I were to play the prude, that hag still tends to think
the worst ...'
845 Friend, pity petalled sprigs on whom steppe-locusts
burst,
The scented tea-plant deep invaded by the thirsty madcap
bee!
Upon Kieu's garden now Ma's storm of spoil flung free,
Not cherishing or sparing gemstone-blooms nor heeding
perfumes rare;
To leave, when done, cold eddies of miasmal air ...
- 850 At last alone once more, the nuptial taper's flare
unsteady still,
Kieu springs from numb incogitance to cries that spill
Wild!—fuming!—now disdaining her late guest, now shrill,
now sobbed in shame:
'What brood, what breed, can spawn such issue; whence such
came,

That for a pin, to sate an itch, find fond this maiming of the
weak?

855 Life's text is clear; no further lessons need I seek:

'Tis not far gods alone but fatal we who wreak our own brute
end!

Her recent woes with newer hopelessness now blend;
And then she bares the knife: death's universal mend equips
her hand!

But wait!—conflicting cares in clashing factions band—

860 Alone—at once! But Ma's bereavement might remand her
folk ... what then?

Polemicised among the mob and courtroom-men

Her quit could gall the magistrate to newly pen those lately
freed! ...

And life, in time, may grow more bearable indeed;

While death—that soon enough arrives, with its decreed and
stolid pace ...

865 And while Kieu fathoms those cross-currents of her case,
An early rooster strains atop a night-embracing garden wall,
Vedettes detecting dawn return each other's call,
And soon our Schoolman-Ma is heard inciting all to quick
decamp.

~

How press those moments on the memory their stamp

870 When hooves first clack and wheels turn creaking,
dry-rut-hampered on the road ...

Some ten miles past that inn there stood a rest-abode
Where old Vuong proffered by the custom's courteous mode
a parting fest.

While in the yard the host makes much of his son-guest,

The mother with the daughter (trembling twain) have
pressed unseen inside—
875 Where now their eyes speak. Lifts and bursts woe's
tearful tide!
Kieu's fluvial, hissed tirade swirls round the petrified dumb
elder dame:
'Now pest has settled on the peach its taint of shame!
Doth duty done receive such meed? Is virtue's claim thus
rendered due?
Aye, in this world, where mud and mist obscure the true,
880 Love's mocked and justice jeered, and greed and botch fordo
our puny laws!
Behold the hundred-years-of-bliss! ... the gods' applause!
Your child is clutched—doubt not—inside the horny claws
of a roue! ...
To leave me at an inn, abandoned that first day ...
And then his manner, lubber's look, that hateful way he struts
about
885 And feeds and gabs—why, he's some mean-born hack
or tout,
Though acts the lord and bullies servants, who go out
the door and sneer!
By no such colour come our gentry of high peer!
Reflect upon him well and you'll find sirrah here in some low
trade! ...
But, there! I ramble while farewells must needs be made:
890 These feet will tread more sullage yet before they wade
to journey's end!
Here Madam Vuong, too well conceiving Kieu's wild trend,
Would vent, and barely checks, a mother's cry to rend
the heaven's vault!
Vuong's auspicious parting toast in prandial malt
Is reft by Ma, who urges forth anew the faltered, waiting
coach.

- 895 Insistent still, the wretched father begs to broach
In suppliant words (as even then the steeds approach)
 this last address:
 'Be kind to her, of willow-frail unreadiness,
 A child whose house hath met mishap and must impress her
 to go serve
In realms where sky and sea their distant tryst observe;
900 Who shall, soft thing, know dread, see prodigies and
 nerveless fears incur;
 Still shelter her, as would a mighty spanning fir!
 Stand arched like winged bamboo, the frosts of night
 detering from that vine! ...'
His words trail off; the guest returns a curt incline:
 'The sacred silken skein hath bound her foot to mine.
 We seek one weal.
- 905 May what the stars compound, the sun and moon reveal,
And any fraud of mine the phantom's blade full feel ...
 No more delays!
 They rattle off mid whorls that busy zephyrs raise,
Which presently the bating train in ochre haze from those
 divide
Who linger yet where hands had loosed. Far-gazing-eyed,
910 They long shall stand to peer at where the blue and wide
 horizon bends ...

VIII

Through countless *li* of strangers' lands the convoy wends:
They cross old bridges spanning mist, woods where impends
 an ageless gloom,
Past huddled reeds whose ward the north-east gales
 foredoom—
And like them, Kieu, beneath those autumn skies of looming
 storm, bends cowed.

915 Come nights when shines the moon laved clear of
 fevered cloud,
Stars glow, and wake the warrants she with Kim had vowed
 once under those ...
Come dawns when leaflets fleck the sky with gold and rose,
And dusks when murmurings of birds recall repose and filial
 rites ...
They ford where streams first fount, skirt nameless mountain
 heights,

920 And then, not short of one round month consumed,
 she sights their goal: Lâm-Tri.
A gate appears, the motion stops, and Kieu can see
Some shape move lurching from behind cane screenery
 towards their car.
A wan complexion she descries first from afar;
But by what provender yon—woman—might self-mar to
 gain such bulk!

- 925 A careless hail to Ma, some queries, then the hulk
Bids her descend . . . and meekly—serves here no high sulk—
Kieu gains the house.
On this side brood bored lasses with artistic brows;
On that, chic sporting youths in flush of festal rouse sing,
toss pots, greet;
And, midward, Kieu discerns an altar, gift-replete,
- 930 Below the bust of some white-eyebrowed paraclete with
knowing eyne:
To votaries of green glee-mansions—your divine
Priapic prince! . . . To servants in that calling's line—grand
patron-sprite,
Who snuffs his meed of smoke and nosegays noon and night.
How many fair ones, charms or arts or strength in flight,
men hard to please,
- 935 Have yet saved all—with robe undraped and doffed chemise,
Have brought him blossom-sprigs and balm, and on their
knees toned mumbled prayers,
Then lined their bed-mats with the fragrant altar-wares,
That bees and butterflies, new-sensing nectared airs, might
make incline?
The crone commands Kieu kneel before the scented
shrine,
- 940 And then above the unenlightened girl's bent spine thus
supplicates:
'May business be secured of favour by the fates;
May each day dumplings send, each night the high-primed
plates of spring's first ide;
May countless guests enamoured of her dearly bide;
May flocks of swifts and orioles their doting tidings
freely tell,
- 945 And wild geese far proclaim the wonder of her spell;
May all her front-door fond adieus yield fonder welcomes by
the back!

Fine freight to weigh an ear, but referent, alack,
Kieu notes there none, while sensing telltale reeks that
smack of devil's brew!

The tutelary board recharged with tribute new,
950 Now Mistress Tu—the hag is she—slumps couched askew
her graceless mass

And bids the girl: 'Bow down before thy grandam, lass;
And thank coz Ma, who father-like thy natal assets toiled to
guard!'

Kieu jibs: 'An exile's lot methought would prove here hard,
Yet deemed I—though a market-purchase and ill-starred—to
know my role;

955 But now cast swallow-plumes reveal an oriole!
May not one timely ask how one's erst-visions dole shall
fledge in fact?

A bride and bride-price crossed in trade, by open pact;
And, since, we've lain and risen and a couple acted as folk do,
Yet here my rank and settlement are ravelled new!

960 I beg Madame, with charity to wifely due, these skeins
uncross.'

Tu hears, divines a fraud that reckons to her loss
And howls as would a witch chance-scorched by hell's own
dross of devilry:

'I see the way that this affair hath gone; I see!
A carcass-theft is what we've got: my man from me she's
turned—my mate!

965 I said explicitly: Go get some female freight,
Unbotched, for us to put to work as yokel-bait—whereby we
eat!

The swine! But vulgar blood in men will ever heat
Their little lusts to folly—rot them—to twice-cheat,
monopolise!

And now that yon fine stuff hath lost her glossy size,

- 970 Gone, gone for aye's the cash—as if entombed it lies—that I
consigned!
But thou, Miss, art to be my goods withal, I find.
Now learn: thou cam'st into this house—its laws I'll bind thee
to maintain!
When yonder goat his will to rut made rude and plain,
Thou shouldst have scorned him fit to freeze his face, made
pain his ears a bit!
- 975 Instead—O wretch—so uncontestingly to submit!
A baggage lewd and lustful this—and from her litter not
weaned long!
I'll teach thee to more timely tell what's right from wrong!
She snatches up a leather knout, swings back the thong and
sets to charge.
'Ye heavens deep, ye worlds incalculably large! ...'
- 980 Cries Kieu, 'see how this flotsam on your gloomy margins
friendless cast,
Here meets the end of her integrity at last!
With that she lifts the glinting blade, from folded fastenings
unveiled ...
She will not dare! Can gems be crushed?—blooms
thus assailed?
As Tu stares—wide-eyed, stunned, a curse cut off
mid-railed—Kieu's hands descend!
- 985 O gods, what wit and beauty thus in sudden end,
That this estate of wind and dust brief-graced, ye rend
to nether shade!

~

Kieu's antic turn aroused the shire: a long parade
Of peering neighbour-folk beset the house, dismayed by this
unknown.
The girl seemed sleeping, sinless in that stillness shown,

990 While near her bent the trembling hag, like one whose own
soul soon might fly.
She had Kieu brought in state to rooms with west-descry,
Assigned some who should mind her, simples sought,
on plying let-bloods fawned ...
Shall pawns dictate the game? Kieu's world-ties held,
while spawned
A febrile brood of woken covenants where yawned the dread
divide,
995 Lent tongue as if by someone tending at her side:
'Wouldst thou and not fixed fate determine if thou'lt bide or
die of woe?
Thy life retains that course predestined long ago
For thy bright peers—to whom the gods do ne'er bestow an
easy end!
Nor beg a close to weary days by prayerful bend,
1000 For first by Tien-Duong's banks must we twain meet—
depend on that far tryst!

A time of salves and philtres, passed in dreamful mist,
Revival brigs, such as betimes may brace the listless,
downcast frond.

Now Tu, attendant by Kieu's curtained bed, new-fond,
Selects such light, pacific words as might despondency
placate:

1005 'Yes, virtue's grand; had we ten lives then plums might wait;
But see our prospect—thou thyself, spring's gift till late, now
near demise!
And then folk say, to spurn a gift is twice unwise;
Thus did I—wrongly, maid of bronze and flint—apprize thee
for our sphere,
Whose sports are merest mist. He erred who brought thee
here.

1010 But now thy bosom's chamber lock, let many weary in their
reach

And learn how 'tis the hand that must approach the peach:
A match we'll flush for thee, some rich cadet, fine-featured,
pedigreed!

So stay thy retribution for slight sins; what need
Bring doomsday on thyself, and by some giddy deed upon
this house?'

1015 Much lulling blandishment the sedulous old blowze
Essays, and points and precedents that heard in drowsiness
ring wise.

And then yon mystic dream did too of late advise
Submittal, and that heaven acts in earthly guise to speed its
plan.

More: if self-will should thwart done duty to her clan,

1020 A next existence might extract more forfeits than need now
be paid ...

Kieu's answer comes at last, infirm and doubt-delayed:
'Well might we wish that pacts in probity first made should
so proceed

To proof; but I have found them wanting once, agreed
And set one day then known the morrow's ways to lead
to nullity.

1025 I fear yon frenzied scented halls will swallow me

At last. That turbid life would then more bitter be than
death's draft clear.'

Thus speaks the hag: 'My child, be festive, of good cheer;
Would I be thus amiss, to trifle with the near things of the
heart?

If future days confute the good I would impart,

1030 Let on this head that fulgent judge, the sun, his darting
torments hurl!

The tyrant's sway so softened calms in time the whirl
Of fears and vague obliquities that lap the girl, and so
she yields.

But like a gem which weedy growth from seekers shields
Tu keeps her close confined. Moon-bathed far hills and fields
are now her friends,
1035 Where from her belvedere the landward view extends
Past folded golden dunes and dark-red radial trends of
footworn ways.
And often here in reverie (before dawned days
Evolve their luminescent morning-cloud arrays) her
spirits tide
From these affects to sentience for him she, near-bride,
1040 Had drunk with from one cup beneath a cognate gliding
moon ... now vain
And vague in this strange sky and mirroring sea-main.
For loss yet lives, and through dire smite and petty stain her
thoughts endure
For Kim. And for her folk, wont once, youth's pillars, sure,
Catalpa-like, to canopy blithe days ... Inuring time allay
1045 Their seasons, daughterless and sere, and grant that they
Stand staunch, that her revering hands might yet one day
their breadths embrace.
She sees beyond the harbour bar the sea's free race,
And ponders on its distant sails, hard bent for places far
away;
Or cons some pristine spring become a muddy bay:
1050 To that then whirling petals float, to die, decay, and
under go ...
She sees wide fields of summer-stupored herb, bowed low
By heaven's heat; earth's brow beneath the sky's foot grow
contused in haze;
Hears how the wind at river-mouth walls waterways
And banks the wavelets high to strike with thunderous sprays
her belvedere.
1055 And often such incessancy at crag and weir
Low-cadenced converse calls from her, in thousand-year-
retold quatrains ...

IX

Then one day, singing by a beaded blind those strains,
An answer, mood and meter meet, returned refrains below
her walls!

It was a youth of years when spring sap-sentient calls,
1060 To whose smooth mien a scholar's snood and brushed-silk
pall's gloss glamour lent.

She felt his repartee was honourably meant
And asked one go inquire. The name So-Khanh that sent,
and that the blade

Had chanced to see, moon-framed upon a screen,
Kieu's shade,

Had sought her since ... She called, he came—and straight
displayed a wrought dismay:

1065 'What tender hues, forsooth, what heavenly bouquet,
What magic stuffs have wafted here to overlay this worthless
place—

Charms fit to dight the clouds that bear the moon-sprite's
race!

Can here a flower, forsooth a flower, retain its grace in grime
and dross?

Wouldst fly? Wouldst brave yond tyrant's rule, Tu's mandate
toss

1070 To naught? O fathom and command the fire that fosters in
this breast—

Sublime one, wert thou to invite a hero's test
 Thou shouldst see how this hand once stretched, forthwith
 would wrest thee from thy cage!

Such resonating tones none but herself engage
 Behind the autumn-mounted shutters which assuage
 each awful word.

1075 Alone, Kieu weighs: Might hope from this be yet inferred?—
 This boy, by her distress excessively so stirred, her luck
 repair?

Yet stormful, fretful times, vicissitudes unfair,
 Will they, these cyclic drouths and floods, but by one's
 daring cede their cease?

Then ventures she to pen a note, a concise piece
 1080 That begs the dauntless hand of chivalry release her from
 her dole,

Recounting too her tribulations part and whole,
 How she, requiting birth, became a lone, lost soul in this
 strange land—

And sends it in that hour when morning mists disband.
 Do wild-goose wings transport that missive to his
 hand, its mark—who knows?

1085 But while the western distance yet gold-motleyed glows
 A counternote appears, with wondrous frugal prose. Its only
 yield—

Two characters upon an apricot-flower field
 That form *tich-viet!* ... Some cryptic pun? ... A catchword-
 sealed child's exercise? ...

Yet she must bend her mind to it. The strokes disguise ...
 1090 *The twenty-first (today!) ... and ... in the dog-star's rising of the
 night!*

Shrill day-birds to abodes in woods have made their flight,
 The arced moon sails above the trellised tea-rose, light
 as half a flower,

When stirred fronds shake on Kieu's east-wall a shadow-
shower,
And she observes from fissured shutters in her bower
So-Khanh's dark writhe.

1095 Abating her unease she goes to him with blithe,
Obliging and propitiating words and lithesome,
sweet appeal:
'A floating weed, a bubble, bird devoid of weal,
Flock-severed and to the beau-monde of gaudy
dealings captive sent,
This weak one begeth thee her curbs to circumvent,
1100 And she shall snare thy foes with loops of grass, present thy
sons gold rings!'
He listens, gravely nods and mutters doughty things:
'Then let the feat proceed, the tumult that it brings inflame
our will!
My reputation thou mayst know, know further still:
I'll void thy woes, which thou deem'st seas, as one may spill
a butt of brine!'

1105 Kieu bows: 'Thine be the direful deed, the debt be mine;
Do soon, when thou so wilt, decide on some design of fair
effect.'
'Outside stand steeds,' says he, 'for coursing-speed elect,
And later by thy baldachin shall tread protecting men
of mine;
If we strike now, without more long-convoked design,
1110 How might the six-and-thirty classic feints combine to better
this?
Let wind and wave roar ire, let rain with spear-points hiss,
No element will turn our set intent amiss once we leave here!
Kieu senses net misgivings, flickerings of fear,
But she has gone this course too far to think of sheering from
the rest:

1115 Eyes bound, foot-free, she shall adventure to the test! ...

Insouciant thus, the Potter turns his wares, the best and those
worst-marred.

By wary progress pass they through the
postern-yard ...

Mount ... go!—a unity of neck-stretched horses, hard-rid,
nose to hock.

~

The autumn night drips by, an oozing water-clock;
1120 Trees drop dank squall-torn leaves; and when a cloud
at cock-crow hides the moon,
And sinks the goose-grass track inside a black lacune,
Her birth-home Kieu—with each new bound this
flight impugning—craves anew ...

More raucous echoings from stirring fowl ensue;
Dawn pales—and now a clamour rearward of the two grows
shrill! ... Ah, burst
1125 Her doom-begotten heart, unhappy from the first!
So-Khanh in night's last darkness merges, melts, immersed
without a trace,
And she, now sole, must gird her timid will to race
On that dread rustic path, dole present in each pace, down
dip, up rise ...
Thus wanton are ye, urchin-despots of the skies!
1130 Thus find ye pastime, plucking down to vandalise the purple
rose!
A horde debouches: these ahead, behind her those ...
Oh, for earth-mining talons, wings that could transpose her
to some cloud! ...
Like fury's flames Dame Tu descends upon the crowd,
And strewing menaces sets-to to convoy cowed, mocked
Kieu away.

- 1135 Returned, no sanction sought the hag, nor yea nor nay,
But raised barbarian hands to rend the rose, to flay the
willow wand! ...
Who born of motherhood might watch without despond
That wrack like petals dropping down, that flush abscond,
turn winter-pale?
Kieu summoned penitence and pleas—to no avail:
- 1140 The scourge descended on her back, her head, assailing,
bringing gore,
Till cried she: 'Mark, all, woman's lot, its bitter lore;
Mark her, removed from born domains, her parents' door,
to hie to lands
Where she must learn her life shall lie in others' hands!
Mark ye these rends that weep in blood their ken she stands
in barren hope!'
- 1145 Her spirits rallied once, then sank beneath the rope:
'Wouldst thou then kill me, Madam?—can thy credit cope
with squander then? ...
But cease! The eel must hide his head, though mud the den!
And thus, saith script, did Kieu in one collapsed
surrender ward renounce.

- And how did Tu on that unsteady moment pounce?
1150 She clinched Kieu's flesh in vassalage, each inch and ounce,
then sealed some wench
Yclept Ma-Kieu as body-bail, wherewith to quench
New wiles (that wretch to forfeit life should Kieu more
venture to rebel);
And then, still menacing—now chilling as a knell
Now hinting, honey-edged—she gave the girl a well-walled
amnesty.

- 1155 Inside Tu's house some solaced Kieu. Ma-Kieu made free
With plain, benign reproofs, instructing her how she should
henceforth act:

- 'Well, here's the goose that would a wolf for ward contract!
 They must outlanders be indeed who'll make a pact with So-
 Khanh's kind,
 A stench among green mansions for his evil mind!
 1160 Why, times untold that lad hath plucked to praise, then
 grind to earth, some bloom!
 He puffs his foppery—but curves, beneath the plume,
 The claw. Tu often like a demon in her room with him
 conspires
 To best a girl—by which he thirty *lang* acquires:
 For, mark, a mite of cost is borne by her who hires
 so rare a one.
- 1165 But best avert thine eyes once baleful things fall done,
 Avoid his crooked path—and quarrels with him shun: death
 walks that way!
 Kieu plained: 'Those brave tirades—to trap and to betray!
 Do really lands conceive such seed, bring forth to day
 so false a race?'

- While Kieu yet trembled from this latest-borne disgrace,
 1170 So-Khanh, like offal in areca spathe, glossed face and foul
 within,
 Himself arrived to scrutinise them with a grin:
 'They tell me that a fledgling baggage here insinuated I
 Enticed her from her mistress, promised her the sky.
 Let her come forth, that she the folly of that lie may
 understand!'
- 1175 Kieu swelled: 'O peace! Here bow we all to evil, and
 Here wrong rules right, false fair: thus bids the boy—
 abandoned, born wry-bent!'
 So-Khanh stopped; then a madness in his eyes unpent,
 And he advanced upon her, hands outstretched, intent
 on dreadful feats!
 Kieu cried: 'Great heaven, wilt thou never fetter cheats?'

- 1180 He speaks of my concocting lies—lies he! Deceits
 occurred—by whom?
Who offered me my freedom from this cave of gloom?—
Raised innocent beliefs to further deepen doom, for pay
 pre-set?
But here retains this letter-paper *tich* and *viet*:
Betokening, accusing, damning him who yet stands smirking
 there!
- 1185 So-Khanh's thrust waned; his dark heart warned him
 to beware:
For some now hissed behind his back, some seemed to dare
 to shed past heed
And ape his airs ... The tide had turned 'forsooth' indeed,
And he, perplexed yet vaunting still his hero-breed, made
 brusque retreat.

X

At work-day's close, when lone, her room now sometime seat
1190 Of brooding rumination, Kieu's reflections mete her woe on
 woe.

O pity her, a crystal once of pristine snow,
Mean matter now become, a vagrant grain below the stellar
 gaze . . .

She self-placates: 'The dismal mends, the gay decays,
And never rosy countenance did plightless raise
 an ample race.

1195 Perfection's path times gone I trod with laggard pace
It seems, and life confounds me now with sequent traces of
 that lack.

Well, virtue's gone—can cracked pots pug their wholeness
 back?

Let then this body's marred frame make a debtor's rack
 for old arrears.'

The twilight comes, the mirror-moon in sheens appears,
1200 And Mistress Tu, at ease, to those of younger years orates
 things wise:

'The toilsome craft of pleasure-faking art too plies,
Where oft some bedlam turn can quickly compromise our
 hard-earned purse.'

To which one dismal wench: 'Of loss of fee, or worse,
To them needs no harangue who deep in hell immerse each
night their flesh ...'

1205 The bawd tells on: 'Humanity's a common mesh:
Who here or elsewhere pays his cash without fine-threshing
terms and price?

Our order's arbours be vies of such clerks entice,
To revel in egregious freak and rare device by moon and sun;
So, daughters, learn ye well how their content is won:

1210 How by the fifteen hidden lores they fall undone within our
power,

How to proffer a surfeit of the willow-flower,
Till stonelike, stupefied, such clods are rolled by our mere
woman's toe!

When to deploy the almond eye, the brow's silk bow,
When to declaim in song the moon, berhyme a blowing
floreade—

1215 For by such follies win we profit from our trade,
And she most gain from her vocation will have made
who minds them best.'

These teachings Kieu too hears, submissive as the
rest;

And arc those crescent moons, her brows, pales lilyest that
damask cheek,

That for the tending on such words her shame bespeak.

1220 How life's chance-turnings, seeming new, bring grief
antique as primal gloom!

A damsel bred to chaste pavilion, covert room,
Is found apprenticed to the practice of a fuming mill, taught
now

The smile, the mince, the frounce, the arched, too-knowing
brow;

Taught too to dread the passing years, her fade, the souring,
sordid end ...

1225 O that our pity might those downward dooms emend
In all implacably so borne, too weak to fend
or flee or quell ...

And so, in Tu's green palace soft-hued brocatel
Part-veiled a special plant, whose very price as well provoked
desire
In bees and butterflies, soon summoned to a gyre
1230 Of frenzied revelry for buzzing weeks entire of mirth-filled
nights.

'A windblown leaf ... a branch on which each bird alights ...'
Sighs Kieu, as morning speeds and nightly meets new flights
of libertines,
Or as she sums the sight (when wine and laughter leans
In vestige-hours) of stark and soul-profaning scenes that tell
the state
1235 Of one who from silk ranks and garlanded of late
Now lies a cast-off boutonniere, dilapidated,
petal-marred.
Has her face yet to night-gales acquiesced, grown hard?
Her body, common fare for ribald, myriad ardour, tired?
turned dull?
Upon that body storms of shame enhavoc shall,
1240 And no caress of spring the soul know more to lull a pretty
maid...

At times she gambols in warm winds, weaves floral braid,
Or smiles to see the moonlit snow disguise the glade beyond
the blinds;
But lone-born fancies grief in cerements soon winds:
Have transient sports and shows long joyed allusive minds
in trouble caught?
1245 At times, again, she brushes strokes of lyric thought,

Or tunes a lute by moonlight, or plays chess, self-fought
 beneath day-fronds,
Yet those are petty gaieties where none responds,
No fellow-sharer to co-braid the cordial bonds of sympathy,
But only sighs of passing winds through cane and tree
1250 To mimic one beset in soul and bodily by brutal tests.
 The girl her heart with summoned memories invests:
But, sick, worn heart, such portraiture no grieving bests but
 new grief earns.
The first nine staves that children lisp, anew she learns,
Which tell of parent-love, a sun whose light returns and
 never stills.
1255 But oh! a thousand *li* beyond these strangers' hills
Dusk falls, and yond, in that ancestral vale (how fills with
 ache this child!)
Stand yet there those *sophóras*, Kieu's two siblings mild,
To keep branch-roofed the greeneries of yore, from wild
 bocage sustained?
 Such thoughts recall her thrice-sworn vow to Kim,
 profaned:
1260 How trod that pilgrim in antipodes, untrained to her
 distress?
Returning to her father's garden—willowless
And relict with wrenched fronds, the remnant verdant tresses
 sorrow-wreathed—
Did he in time accord that last request, soul-breathed,
That cognate grafting bud on branch by Kieu bequeathed to
 sister Vân?
1265 But there such themes unravel, meet her mind's own
 ban,
And at such times she needs must rise from those dear
 phantoms of her land
And solitary by veiled panes a long time stand
To wait the sky's awakening, the blazing brand of next day's
 sun.

Ah, yes: crow's flight. Anon: the hare's recurring run . . .
1270 And, by that cycle, thoughts of all proscribed, undone and
damned to grieve
Return: 'What! will our pain some rest at last achieve? . . .'
Her cry's response: 'Aye—virtue's title we'll receive, urned
ashes get,
Worn exiles in a world of dust! Or, to abet
The jest, ignominy will stick upon us yet—and there's the
end!'

XI

1275 A traveller from far arrived, of easy tend,
Ky-Tam his name, cognomened Thuc, another rendered
from schooled breed,
From southern Tich, Thuong prefecture, the migrant seed.
He came to Lâm-Tri in his sober father's lead to further trade,
Soon heard to queen-of-raptures Kieu such plaudits paid
1280 As fired him too to feel her soft-armed accolade. He sent his
card.
The drapes part—and enchantment fixes his regard!
What piquant aspects these, what lineaments unmarred, to
be revered!
A dawn-camellia this, in limb and bloom unpeered!
Here spring smiles, where outside galled winter chafes his
beard and icy smarts!
1285 That night the moon on dormant buds May's touch
imparts,
And midst the blowing balm intoxicated hearts soon slip
constraint
And with rare ecstasies the firmament acquaint.
Anon, love's ligature twines round the pair a dainty,
binding bond,
Coy lady's peaches to brave suitor's plums respond,
1290 Sighs crystallise in deathless stone and vows scroll ponderous
on brass . . .

By sudden need the elder Thuc, it came to pass,
Left, bound for far affairs. Unhampered hence by
 masquerades, the son—
Who lived by this in rapt dreams ten to waking one—
Could now enact at will the risen spring's enunciated urge,
1295 Warm-borne on winds and nights' pelagic stellar surge.
Now did dusks balconied and garden-dawnings burgeon
 joys! They capped
Each other's verse, manoeuvred chessmen, fulgour tapped
From morning air, noon-tea and timeless wines; Kieu lapped
 the half-moon lute
And sang of scant hours stolen from tomorrow's suit;
1300 And so each learned the other's innermost, most moot and
 merest mood ...

Shy eyes incline—and tides will swell, whose coups include
Subversions that both palaces and billets rude have borne
 away.
Young Thuc submits to float upon such forces fey,
And for each glance and smile gold ballasts of defray will
 gladly drop.
1305 The bawd makes much of Kieu with comb and powder-mop
Those days, for how she froths to see the thinnest copper
 pass her nose!
 Below the moon the cuckoo calls to summer's rose;
By walls the pomegranate kindles darker glows, like lanterns
 wee,
And now in silk-hung rooms, from undertakings free,
1310 Behind a curtain Kieu steps orchids, sweetly seasoning her
 bath.
Were prick-eared elves that gauze to bore with thorn or lath,
How might the breach draw roving eyes upon a path
 to pulchritude!

The young man peeks—and with conceits on what
he viewed

Turns droll their supper-songs. But thus would Kieu conclude
his saucy chimes:

1315 'Thou malapert! Yet elegantly weave those rhymes
Adornments fit to clad a lacking dame betimes. To such
brocade

I too should my poor coda now append—afraid,
Yet, that a spaniel's tail would ill such sable aid. But
home-thoughts din

Reproof for these disports, from strict though distant kin,
1320 And I must beg to leave unpaid return for minstrelsy now
heard.'

Here Thuc retorts: 'Thy kin? Bodes strange indeed that word:
Didst thou not from yond trunk, Dame Tu, among the
girding branches grow?'

Kieu's eyes store autumn streams that inundations know
From storms late-passed and, lambent, offer further flow,
as she replies:

1325 'Graft-plants and concubines submit to severed ties
From arbours born, to form for bees and butterflies
beflowered hives—

When, plainly, garden-husbandmen, ye lack not wives!
But, there, what serves to sigh. Grief wastes our little lives;
our season's brief.'

Thus he: 'In that first instant when we met I lief
1330 Did swear within my soul by each arch-peak and chiefest
font this oath:

To seek a century of bliss and thee betroth! ...
But more recount. This drift I would fain sound to both its
end and source.'

And she: 'May heaven bless and thy good words endorse;
Yet must I pause in joy to think this happy course to rue
might lead:

- 1335 Their lingering by bagnios oft in men will breed
A random passion for some trifling scented weed or floral
toy—
But once first-pollens ash-like blow and perfumes cloy,
Do ye long loyal bide, or heed those whose employ hath
grown to bore?
And mark: for thee the Cinnamon Grove Bourn before
1340 Love's Lunar Palace keeps one wife to ward the door from
rival press,
Who clearly will defend her dear domain, grown less
If comes another to partake what she possesses first
unshared.
Were I, a drifting weed, a scud of spray brief-flared,
That sea of domesticity to vex have dared, 'twould surely
heave,
1345 O'erwhelm pair-amity and threefold turmoil leave!
Who'd beg then heaven's own avenger for reprieve: that wife
placate?
If raised thou iron arching arms 'twould but abate
A tithe those woes yon queen of our domestic state would
lade on me,
However hid her wrath in public dignity:
1350 Aye, fallen in the gullet of a lion-she would be this vine!
I'd creep beneath her roof, head bent in meek incline,
To sup on salt and caustic vinegar, to dine on sulphur-fire!
More yet. Remains the Cedar's stance, thy righteous sire:
Would he, from stately heights observing, bate his ire, drop
pity down
1355 Upon a willow by a lane of ill-renown?
And Tu: would she detect here some excuse to drown
me in new lows
Of yet more squalid disrepute and foolish shows?
Beware: our love's display might infamy impose upon
your name—
They're apt to lose the trove who needlessly proclaim

1360 Its find ... But thou choose how we tread, discreet or gamely,
our one road.'

Thus Thuc: 'What aftermaths of bane these musings
bode;

Unmeet to such a two whose lives so blithely flowed
and melded late.

'Tis not to trek to Ngô or Lao we contemplate—
Though hardships would but lift our love, elucidate it,
doubts eclipse.

1365 Conjoined, what dread we here or yond where distance dips?
Sure, vows on bronze and stone abide the feather-whips of
winds and waves? ...'

They plumbed each scruple, sieved its utmost lees and laves,
Then covenanted new their innermost enclaves of heart in
plight,

And purposed, last, that they should test their fate that night!

1370 Within the folds of western hills the hare from sight
of day had hid,

When strolled they to a grove (some heard them say to rid
There languors) ... Thence, a night-flight found them free
amid a dawn new-dyed.

Here poises war! ... But craft alone, and threat implied,
Prevails. To rattle Tu's resolve Thuc pays a pride of braves-
for-hire

1375 To offer her such imminence of gore and fire
That presently she thinks it prudent to retire and for peace
sues

(Though to her hand a balm of cash as well accrues).

Now Kieu can pass with primmest folk and well-to-
dos the burghers' gate;

With all decorum's claims and those of greed grown sate

1380 She lives soul-lightened, elfin-footed, freed of late-borne
 mire anew.
 The plum tree bloomed, writ tells, beside the plumed
 bamboo;
The sea embraced the new-freed stream; love drew, and grew
 by, gratitude.
Time calmly lapsed in scented days, and nights ended
With gemstone skies, and eves and dawns that hovered hued
 in lotus-pink ...

XII

- 1385 Six months their choir of songs and sighs that concord link,
Then gold invests the courtyard plane-trees, tips the brink of
every branch,
Frost-daisies autumn-born by bottom hedgerows blanch . . .
And on an hour Thuc *père* arrives!—bursts avalanching from
without!—
Stoops from a trek-worn nag to thunder down a shout
- 1390 Of wrath bred in his breast since first he turned about to part
the twain!
He drums this dreadful bid: that one wretch straight
constrain
The other's powdered cheeks to track to that domain
they lately left!
Paternal will has manifestly always reft
Demur from sons; yet one would now with test of deft
conceits make bold:
- 1395 'A slave am I, whose felonies are manifold,
Such that this head high heaven's hail and worldly scolding
bowed must bear;
Yet hands in indigo once dipped come forth not fair,
And love's refrain will rattle hearts beyond repair or
wise dispraise.
But sure some lyric harmony from done lute-days
- 1400 Still charms you, sir—should I then muse on broken stays
and silent strings?

If hap to your high-judging heart some youth yet clings,
Recall past joys, and on this son harsh renderings determine
not ...'

Such words the old man hears as rare a father got,
And liver-fired he seeks the law to straight allot him strict
redress.

- 1405 Now seems it as if rampant seas some mead possess:
A red-sealed yamen's bill bids seize the pair for questioning
forthwith,
Who soon are dragged behind the prefect's bumptious kith,
Abused and flung before that tyrant, pale and pithless on his
tiles!
Above, they see a coal-black face devoid of smiles,
1410 The mien of one who bodes the brace shall feel his bile's
stirred heat! He roars:
'Here be a scoundrel, foolish-faced, who covets whores!
And there a guller lies, a borer of the cores in market-
weights:
Some ponce-discarded plant whose odour none now sates,
Yet still with overlards of rouge-pot pollen baits the
bumpkin's leer!
- 1415 Deducing from the plaintiff's rank, my worthy peer,
The verdict falls foregone, if yet remains unclear in their
offence
Who rode and who was saddled. But—the consequence:
Ye may decide yourselves and choose directly hence
what doom to draw:
One shall, to both, chastisement mete by rod of law;
1420 The other bids her to her mansion's gaudy maw make brisk
return!'
Loud grieves the girl: 'I need no second lesson learn,
My mind is made: that web of woe no more shall earn
its prey by me!—

Pure, stained, this body yet remains my property!
Still, driven youth in weakness begs a kindly lee from
this great court ...!

1425 'Let retribution start with her!' he cuts her short.

Stocks yoke her limbs—a delicate, mild madderwort
by baulks impaired—

And what lament might succour Kieu, if cry she dared—
Her pale cheeks smeared, that willow-bend of brows
uncared-for, caught with bract,

Recumbent in a pit of mud and sand compact,

1430 A sullied mirror now that face, a plum-frond racked by frosts
that frame?

Consider then Thuc's grief, the frightened youth's
self-blame,

When he, diurnally beholding things whose shame his
entrails rent,

Now cried: 'So this is how blest lives to bad are bent!

Ah, had I known betimes that by some such event as
this mischance

1435 My heedless happy heart would thus her doom advance—

Known scented nights might sour, and dawns of once-
entrancing days yield these!

The prefect caught those whispered complaints upon the
breeze,

And acting on a fancy, whimsically pleasing some arcane
Or jocund prompt, proposed that Thuc should entertain

1440 His household with the tale. Long spake the tearful swain,
and thus then closed:

'Events have hastened to that pass she had supposed;

Though cautioned she our star was wan I overglozed
her fears too well,

Conceiving foolishly that I could better tell,

And so she yielded, and I brought her to this melancholy
day!

- 1445 The great man's silent muse averred the story's sway;
He checked harsh hands and bad the circumvalate stay
 of law be loosed,
Pronouncing: 'Peace! and let this feud for now be truced,
While we review yon night-bloom's worth ... perhaps
 traded by faulty light.'
'A fern is she,' Thuc owned, 'a bubble, demi-slight ...
1450 Withal,' he pressed, 'once known to art, where inkstone-
 bight and brush-tip meet.'
The prefect snorted: 'Then her stocks lend theme and sheet
On which to pen an epigram ... Let's see some feat from that
 high skill!
Done!—brushes brought, Kieu straight fulfilled the
 great one's will,
And then the beam was raised for his still doubting,
 ill-disposed decree.
1455 Now pealed his praise: 'Why, this outsings Duong
 poesy! ...
A thousand gold, just for the script, would scarcely be award
 undue!
With her, wise youth, will ye be such a suited two
As not the storied clans of Châu and Trân more truly
 matched their heirs!
Cease rankling cries! Still jostlings! Strife life's chord impairs,
1460 Makes fiddlestick and strings contrary draw where
 there's most want they meet.
This brace was brought before law's open-portalled seat,
Where mercy still in salutary time retreat to ire affords.
'Bride cleaves to groom's paternal clan,' our code accords—
So be it! To Thuc senior: 'Sir, cease baulks towards her and
 your seed!'
1465 And then a public wedding for them he decreed.

Wind-borne come floral palanquins, and galaxied high-
 flaring brands,

And gongs and trumpets swelling to parading bands,
That tend the couple to hung halls in orchard-landscaped
nuptial courts . . .

1470 Allayed at last by Kieu's sweet heeds and artful sports,
Old Thuc his fulminations stills against the torts of this base
world;

The orchid and the tuberose grow leaf-enfurled,
And all becomes the more benign for wrath unburled
to smoothness new.

XIII

In morns wine-mellowed, noontime arbour'd chess, the two
Lived cloudless days. Peach petals fell, the lote-ponds grew
new margins green;

1475 Then on a still night, when behind silk screens unseen
They lay, Kieu sounded restive, hidden, ever-keener
thoughts to Thuc:

'Since first I rose a reed reviving by thy brook,
The flight of salanganes recovering their nook fulfils
one year;

Yet, strange, no missive from thy country comes; while here

1480 The idle quote: 'Young wine's more cheer than bran
and beer—when old wives stale,

With new wassail!' ... But then such folk as soon assail
One's envied lot, don righteousness and some vile tale
in time foment.

And note: thy first wife, as is borne by rumour's vent,
Wears yon a strange, still smile, and utters ill anent our
match no word!

1485 I fear such wills that lie uncommonly interred,
Stream-depths that sometimes seem less easily averred than
footless seas:

For we have lived in nuptial plait full twelve months these
And 'twould transcend all nature if she found that pleasing
or as naught.

While comes no missive from her, no conclusive thought,
1490 What webs may not be spreading o'er that dimness-fraught
mid-interspace?

Attend me then, I beg: return to her apace
To sweeten there her reveries and face-to-face their
trend remark:

For, long evasion, fitful hints of something dark,
Will disconcert at last our now composed and archetypal
life.'

1495 Thuc pondered on the prudent counsels of his wife,
And, acquiescing, gathered up his travel-trifles to that end.
Next dawn the Ancient Cedar saw his son make bend,
Content the young man should spur home to tardy-mend his
marriage dues.

The stirrup-cup their parting-bower with gloom imbues,
1500 And likens it to those wan banks where lovers, musing, last-
linked bide

Beside the Tan's green ribbon, portal and divide,
Whose tattered willows fringe Duong-Quan and partly hide
the poplared pass.

They hold hands, groan good-byes and sigh in joint alas;
Or, wine neglected, now they touch, now part, long
masterless of say.

1505 Then Kieu speaks: "Twixt us must stand seas and
cragged array,
Until thy greater wife grants ease to lesser clay, this
concubine.

Till then, beware: one notes the bodkin hid, where nine
The brightness of the bodice see. Doves still decline the
one-eyed cook!

Nor need she long suspicion of our passion brook:

1510 Arriving, ponder no finesse of tactic-book—our tale narrate!
And if tempestuous spates should flood and ventilate,

- Then bid her know her first-wife's sovereignty and state
stand absolute,
That I submit to fate. 'Tis best we wile refute,
Than later bear vexations from the gods, now mute, whom
frauds provoke.
- 1515 I beg thee, by our love, retain these things I spoke
A twelve-months' span, which would have passed with time's
same stroke if thou wert here,
And think the toast imbibed today a souvenir
Of past cups, and precursing those at thine appearance one
year hence.'
Thuc mounts, her fingers brush his robe, and he goes
thence.
- 1520 He rises to the wooded rim of those immense and empty
bounds,
And soon, a league away, where red dust nigh surrounds
Him to his saddle-pack, around a copse he pounds, to pass
from sight.
Kieu turns: to bide alone five watches of the night;
While often Thuc shall lie beneath a lunar light opaque,
remote—
- 1525 For surely some strange moon will glow by other rote
On yonder void, then gold above their pillow floated, nights
now done?

XIV

Unheeding haps that on his path our Thuc will run,
The record turns to household protocols plied under his first
spouse:

A scion she, sired off an erst-prestigious house,

1530 The child of one who once ruled ministries of thousands,
Hoan her name.

Luck's winds had wafted Thuc to shores of faded fame,
Where he had braided locks with Hoan: whom folk thought
amiable, they said,

And faultless mannered, yet had, likewise, stubborn-bred
A bent for argument, pursued until the dead were two times
noosed.

1535 Now prate about some new rose in her park was
loosed ...

From Thuc no nay. The publication grew diffused ...
her spouse mute bode.

She smothered flames within her breast ... they hotter
glowed;

Till she must scour the blackguard's moonlit sports in mode
presageful, thus:

'Had he but taken counsel with, confessed to us,

1540 We'd brooked that wench as nether-dame and scorned
to fuss at her degree:

For 'twould bring mock to grudge men's ancient scope,
and be

Mart-known as she who certified monogamy as envy's
choice.

Yet what a fumbling this, this gift to common voice
And ribaldry, this puerile, vulgar farce, this oyster's gaucherie

1545 Of thinking muddy deeds e'er bide from dredging free!

But if they mean to circumvent us, plots can we as
specious spin ...

Yet stay—these are but trifles, naught to fret therein:

Two ants they be inside a bowl, nor from their gin
escape yet seek ...

But they shall learn to shun each other's eyes in pique

1550 And shame and helplessness! Their necks ne'er more in
meekness up shall arc!

The world will, by this hand, the fate of rascals mark
Who would collude to discompose the marriage bark
and build anew!

Her buried, ripening design none from her drew,
Nor babble on the matter did she heed that grew and ebb'd
a-gale;

1555 Until the day there came to her to tattletale

Two, who for favour from their betters tease forth frailties
hid in man.

She heard them, then hissed rage as only wifedom can:

'O loathsome villains, ever weaving cant to scandalise some
soul:

Know that our husband be no wretch of worldly dole,

1560 To have the menial maws of slanderers parol his rectitude!

And with that breath she had her retinue extrude

Them from the house, their brainpans bloody and imprudent
mouths a wrack!

Her home then sealed in peace, its temper rendered back,

And none within or out who dared repeat Thuc's lackings by
a word;

1565 Her peach-pink halls all hours with sunny business stirred,
She smiled when going forth, and pleasant quips were heard
when she returned—
But night and day a hundred fires within her burned!

Then, nearing her rosarium movement is discerned: soon
Thuc dismounts!
By what whirled words each spouse the other one
recounts

1570 The roll of separation's storms, hope's near-drouthed
founts—a dinned, dear race!
Now happy bowls his dusty trek's fatigues efface ...
And none in that gay rout might note the pregnant space
within their hearts.
Thuc seeks to read such tokens as Hoan's mien
imparts,

And more than once has nigh resolved to shun all arts,
decant his breast;

1575 But then with laughing cheer, wine-warm and self-possessed,
She waves away all dwelling on late dole, arresting parley's
van;
Whence thinks he: 'Why, a leak would now impair the pan!
Am I being racked beneath the city barbican and must
confess? ...'

And so he hesitates, weighs up the more, the less,

1580 Averse to chance a forest on his head through pressing
on a vine.
Among their bright conversing, songs and jests
benign

The lady makes at times what seems some sweet, design-
devoid remark:

'Ah, yes, our golden vows above mere bronze shine stark ...'
Or: 'Hollow's common faith; but ours, ours stands
bulwarking, unafraid ...

1585 For which conviction thank I those vile mouths that made
Late trial upon our name. I scorned their taunting, brayed by
reprobates—

Though many raw young wives and suchlike empty-pates
Might have despaired and lent the mockers and their mates
true butts for jest!

The husband hears her playful words, their sense
unstressed,

1590 And likewise makes his own riposte with quips and festive
counterploys;

And with such compositions purls their jocund noise,
While fuse two shadows on the wall, oppose and poise
beneath the moon ...

Then, perch and cress and country calm sooth Thuc
quite soon:

Months pass, pools mirror hanging gold, cold winds maroon
the strew of trees

1595 On bank and beach, and now these temporalities
Recall forgotten frontier-hues, past-seasons' seas and other
winds ...

As he divulgement mulls, his wife the need prescinds,
One day remarking, while the balms of all the Inds make
mild her tone:

'A year yon silver clouds attend thy father lone,

1600 Since thou hast sonship last in daily duties shown: go to
Lâm-Tri.'

To hear those words is as to feel his soul set free!
Through streams and over voided plains now presently his
colt's hooves ply,

Where inlets mirror to their depths the lucent sky,
And distant forts on eve-mists float, and farther highlands
bear dawned day ...

- 1605 No sooner cracks Thuc's whip to start him on his way
Than Hoan prepares her equipage and sans delay attains her
 kin,
Thereat to tell the widow matron-mandarin
A daughter's pass, how Thuc had settled her in infamy and
 woe:
'The thing devours me like the mange, yet, jealous throe
1610 And pricking tantrums rained on him would garner no
 esteem to me,
And so I turned aside in taciturnity.
But I have hid a vengeance sheathed, of due degree and
 ready-whet!
To whit: by land-route to Lâm-Tri a month must set,
But more direct and brief the pass across abetting seas avails,
1615 And with well-chosen menials to bestir the sails,
Here, fettered by her feet and girt in martingales she
 soon shall bide—
To learn exhaustion, hebetude, and turpid-eyed
To mark with waxing shame and daily-dying pride the jeers
 of all!
Thus she, and he, may make return for my just gall—
1620 And long their tale shall render rhymes to caterwauling drabs
 and stews!
The noble dame admires Hoan's more than mortal
 ruse,
Makes much of her, and bids that such resorts she use as
 both command.
A junk is rigged, empyrean-probing masts, lug-spanned;
Two hirelings, Hound and Hawk yclept, a bully-band
 of rogues obtain,
1625 Who, told their object, soon concoct a sly campaign
And on obliging winds to Te's sea-lapped terrain conduct
 the sail.

XV

Kieu's figure often falls upon the window-veil,
As she divides long pensive spans between Thuc's trail and
far kin's plight:
'Here, day restores the groves of mulberry to light;
1630 But yonder, doth gloom rise, doth winter turn its bite,
or summer spare
Those dear, denied my dues? Ah, *dues*: a lock of hair
Bespoke commitments once—did its regrowth declare those
vows unwrought? ...
A nether-wife become—O irony unthought!
And hath thus then the god of love his cohorts taught, their
law revealed?—
1635 Once false, why, hence ye may to further lovers yield! ...
O would I had a moon-sprite been, in some ice-shielded
dwelling place!
The night wafts autumn through the courtyard
screens; a pace
Beyond them Kieu looks up: the Dog Stars seeming trace
Thuc's nomen line!
Dismayed, she sets to tend the lamp on Buddha's shrine
1640 And supplications make beneath that sky, inclining to
the Lord.
Then from the sylvan verges rises up a horde!—

With howls that hell's own fiends naive to such discordance
would affright,
Thugs crowd the garden-court, blades glinting in the night,
And on the girl—by horror girt, devoid of might to raise a
wrist—

1645 From somewhere suddenly descends an opiate mist:
A physic comatose, by which she swoons, abyssed in nullity!
Some now athwart a horse transport her to the sea,
While others fire the ornate rooms, Thuc's treasury of scrolls
and lore;
Then, having found a relic-corpse washed up the shore,
1650 The laughing fiends propel it on the flames, in forgery
of her!
Her servants meanwhile, wits on wing, whose heels but stir
The shrubbery in flight, seek only ward in cur-holes, where
they lie ...

The elder Thuc had settled his abode nearby:
Aghast he sees the cresting glow, and tremors ply his ancient
frame!

1655 Distraught, men, master, speed towards the site, to tame
The conflagration, wildly ululate Kieu's name, to seek
her form!
But increments of wind augment the fiery storm,
And still, around, beyond, they peer, where any normally
might seek,
But only meet some other seeker's pallid cheek
1660 Or frightened eyes. Behind and in each bosk they peek,
round wall, down well,
Then fetching at the locus of Kieu's perfumed cell,
They see there heaped within the remnant cindered
shell those blackened bones!
Now honest folk ill-mark nefarious overtones:
'There lies poor Kieu! ...' they wail in woe, 'who else those
owns?—here's no mistake!'

- 1665 Old Thuc stands devastated, mourns for his son's
sake—
The absent boy—and for the maledict unmake of that brave
girl.
He has the bones conveyed where silks might them enfurl,
And laid in confined state inside his house their churlish pass
grieve less ...
The funeral concludes its dismal lavishness,
1670 When tidings sound—young Thuc is by the landward
crescent come just then!
He steps inside environs erst of brush and pen,
And finds all ash—become a roofless, windy den for welkin
sport!
He hies him to his father's house: the central court
Displays among hoar altar-tablets to the mort a new
compend—
1675 A stone attesting to his Kieu's unlucky end!
Thuc feels the silken cord then snap, his innards rend
and liver burn!
He sags upon the tiles, and plains: 'O fate, stone-stern,
Must such perfection then be razed, when ills eternally
endure?
Bamboo and plum we were, ensembled, graft-secure ...
1680 Who might have told that day I loosed our ligature we'd part
for aye?'

And long his grieving drummed that sempiternal *Why?*
Until none knew wherewith to soothe his soul, whereby his
humours raise.
But in the neighbourhood one lived with magus ways,
Who roasting amulets and lifting palms could fays to speak
invoke,
1685 Though from the Three Fair Isles or hell's Nine Springs they
spoke,

And had full many mystic secrets thereby broken to bright
light.

When urged, Thuc met the seer with gifts and pomps polite
To have him question Kieu among night's thralls, despite that
death kept key.

Prostrate before her tablet, freed that devotee

1690 His soul (as gum or myrrh vent fumes) the time a cedarn
scent-stick burned,

And then with sacral wisdom fraught his soul returned.

Thus spake the seer: 'The mistress bides not yond, yet learnt
I tidings there:

Life's load of misery she needs must further bear

For past arrears; they, hidden seeds of more despair, have
disallowed

1695 Release, and with unsought endurance her endowed.

More: prospectless a year ye twain forlorn and cowed shall
pass, and then,

Though come again in face to face conjunction, when

Each might with new delight upon the other ken—ye shall
not dare!

Thuc listened to this quaint account with waning
care:

1700 Where bones and brands obtained, and, late, a barrowed
burial, as here,

Who could give credence to the nonsense of some seer,

Could hope to see Kieu more—hope twice this dust-dark
sphere such light might bring?

Remained but grief: for one gone bud, one specious spring,

For life, which seldom with our common drabness mingles
things of grace.

1705 Sure, tides had borne that fallen bloom to some still place ...

XVI

Or is the sea of shades indeed this restless space?—
 hell's fiends *bere* reign?
 Hound, Hawk, triumphant in their stroke, the
 naughty twain
Support unapprehending Kieu and shipboard gain; then,
 she below,
High rise the sails, the halyards hum, the junk from blow
1710 And current favour finds, and soon by canny go makes fall
 at Tich.
Disboard they there and lay before the noble brick
Of Hoan's birth-manse their prize: flaunt forth, the rogues,
 their wicked handiwork!
 Suspended still in stupor's unabated murk,
Kieu passes by strange hands towards the nether lurk
 of servants' cells,
1715 To there first stir from dreams of fire and demon yells:
Her late abode has vanished—where? What wonder tells
 this low vault barred?
Bewildered, faculties befogged and terror-marred,
She makes out words of bid above for her untardy tendance
 nigh:
And straight a tribe of minions speed her to comply.
1720 Their jostle bears her to the ducal suite; a higher servitor
Conveys her to where dull gold glyphs above a door

Still testify: *By Heaven's Mandate, Councillor to Court and Crown.*
There, reigns the dowager; lamps flank her, sending down
Redundant rays—the day alone confirms her frown!
Enthroned and dight

1725 In seven preciousities decrepit might
Probes piecemeal, root and branch, Kieu's timidly recited,
candid tale.

Then suddenly the dame discharges thunder! ... hail!
She rails: 'What vagabonds about us lately trail—a flaunting
brood!

Here stands one, scarce a weanling—dead to rectitude!
1730 A chit who'll suit herself, her master's law elude or spouse
forsake,
To band with cats and fowls that ready couchings make
In tombs and tussock fields!—the stamp of one to fake and
fraud inclined,
Has had her carcass to this house by sale assigned,
Yet puffs her virtue to such heights! She'll learn to mind the
way of folks:

1735 Without there—ho!—bestir ye! Drub her thirty strokes,
That from this day anon she'll know pretence invokes our
heavy hand!

A choir of lackeys echo 'Aye!' to her command ...
Would that a hundred trenchant tongues might cry
them 'Stand!'—but naught avails:

The pack belabour her with poles and bamboo flails,
1740 Till bruised flesh cowers, liver-seated courage quails ...
So savaged might

The peach, the plum frond—symbols of the erudite,
The sung—hang woebegone when lawless winds May's
smiting raids withdraw ...

By fiat Kieu is dubbed now Blossom Slave—Hoa-nô—

- And headlong pressed to toil in high-born women's gauzy
rooms as maid,
1745 To labour like a blue-gown-garbed domestic jade,
And grow in time pinched, tangle-haired and leaden-faded,
dull of skin.
An ancient chattel-stewardess employed therein,
Regretful for Kieu's ceaseless tread on petty ministries, treats
her
Now tea, now stirs her some potation to deter
1750 An ague, and long herself serene, no fear inferring from fate's
sway,
Sums thus Kieu's tale: 'Life may blow bland or bitter may:
The willow and the reed the wind's intent allay by bending
low,
And that which karma metes is best so borne. If woe—
'Tis from the passions of past life, or this; thou knowest so,
methinks.
1755 Now list—walls here have ears like forests secret sinks—
Spie'st thou him joined to thee in temporal world-links,
decline his glance,
Lest later penalties like bolts on both should chance!
Thus ants and bees may seek to bear the happenstances
of high will.'
But often tears upon Kieu's cheek enpearl and spill,
1760 When lone, embittered agitations overflow her breast. Then
she
Such urged quiescence thwarts in some soliloquy
As this: 'From dust to fouler mire—and no more free of frays
I blow!
Wherefore this eagerness of storms to trouble so
A rootless-rendered rose, to harry and bestow her
bloom away?
1765 Can justly pend on me such penalties to pay
For ancient sin? Must so much blight and dross defray that
long-done deed?'

And so Kieu bides her bane, much hid from social
heed;
Until Thuc's main wife visits by wont custom's need her natal
seat.
Dame, daughter parlay trifles first, then cogent meat;
1770 Therefrom, in fine, the mother summons Kieu and fleetly
says her say:
'Thy mistress this, a lady parasoled doré,
Needs servants. Go, Hoa-Nô, take care to well obey
her boudoir's bid!
Submissive, Kieu inclines, conforms, her humour hid;
For be it hell or heaven tug, what writhe might rid her of the
rope?
1775 She serves quotidian rounds with combs and clouts and soap,
Her vassalage prescribed, inured to know no hope nor think
dissent ...

Then came a night that found in peace the firmament,
When Mistress Hoan would put to proof Kieu's old fine bent
with reed and chord.
The girl, obedient, stroked silk strings on fretted board,
1780 And lo, those liquid airs as if a whit restored an arid heart:
The lady, sentient to such melancholy art,
Thenceforward tempering somewhat the stringent charter of
her rule.
Still, Kieu, become for foreign foot a servile stool,
With gloom endured each day, and, labour-worn, with puling
met each night,
1785 When Lâm-Tri's barely-recollected arbours might
In dreams return ... But can spent flows drouthed ferns
delight? ... gone green repair?

~

While autumn clouds confine with white the upper air,
And mass to circummure Kieu's prison further there,
 long leagues away
The months fulfil their ordered measure day by day,
1790 Composing Thuc. With thoughts on spoil and cinders grey
 and ash void-blown,
He shuns a time his Lâm-Tri comrades, fulsome grown,
Oft mulls on mandarin-fowl (faithful, ever-lone they once
 dispersed).
The crescent moon recalls those brows that from the first
So charmed. Her remnant rouge yet breathes ... Such pangs
 rehearsed grow worse in sum.
1795 The lotus passes, blows then the chrysanthemum,
And pensive fancies seem to deaden with autumnal days,
 until—
A duller lull, and winter turns, as lovers will,
To cheer and dormant amities revived ... one still awaits of
 yore!
And Kieu? There, fate has ruled ... He balms with stoic lore
1800 Old pain, and breeds moods growing to a yearning for his
 native land.

XVII

A beaming spouse met Thuc returned from Lãm-Tri strand
With portal-welcoming. They grieved that breadths
 unspanned had kept them two;
Then by and by Hoan summoned of her retinue
Such menials as in turn must make obeisance to the
 homecome lord ...
1805 With feet that faltered, forth came Kieu in slow
 accord,
For from afar the manifesting truth disordered thus her mind:
'Have fulgid suns or lamp-glare seared these eyes purblind?
For surely none but Scholar Thuc is yond reclined—
 that presence couched! ...
Now will our hid liaison tremble forth debouched! ...
1810 Or was the hare with other purpose snared and pouched? ...
 Ah, dodge unmatched!
This vale of frauds and plagues the like before ne'er hatched,
Nor came of yore to fret us such a fiend, dispatched
 from hell's divide!—
That which was duly deemed our bond of groom and bride
She's turned to this: the rule and servitude of widely-
 sundered spheres! ...
1815 Speak, Thuc! ... There sits she, laughs, the fuddled dupe
 endears,

While sharper perfidy attends her than appears in
any knife! ...'
As nether earth to heaven's far and lofty life,
Domestics stand to masterdom, whose *shall!* turns cipher
custom's *can*.
Kieu conned Thuc's face—and hope died, smitten in that
scan.

1820 As agitated silkworms oft their wombed skeins tangle, such
a knot
A like distress unseen within her soul was got ...
She made her silent bend on Hoan's gay, apricot-tiled inner
court.

Thuc starts. His will would scatter what his eyes import!
'What prodigies work here,' he thinks, 'that forge for sport
lost Kieu? And she
1825 Reduced by some dark circumstance to this degree!
Yet, still—she lives! ... And netted in a web are we! And
there, inert,
The huntress bides!' His words to Kieu are careful, curt—
Though how to stanch these tears that brilliant-like divert
the watching eye?—
And draw from Hoan this quip, requiring weighed reply:
1830 'So soon returned to us; what sudden bane moves my good
husband's mien?'
Thus he: 'But late, weeds wore I for my mother's keen,
And when in thought I walk Di's wastes, once fecund-green,
then wakes a grief
Outlasting time.' Hoan hails a loyalty so lief;
But now calls cups: let wine help lave all old or brief-borne
woes away!
1835 Wife, husband, alternate their toasts by roundelay,
While Kieu stands by with ready gourd to tend as may each
quaffed libate:

Now stayed now spurred to serve the cursory dictate
Of Hoan, to vassal-kneel at fretful knee, to wait on drooping
hand ...
Thuc dazed grows, hopeless, void ... succumbs at
length, unmanned,
1840 To tipplers' tears, whose fluxions, drop and stream,
flow tandem with the wine.
His speech is joyless, mirth a gruesome anodyne—
Till he would feign at last a drunken, tired reclining on the
board ...
But here the wife calls sharply: 'Hoa, persuade the lord
To drain his dram; and see the beaker's straight repoured,
or thou shalt smart!'
1845 And so our scholar, mind tormented, tortured heart,
Quaffs dry more proffered drink, though soapberries and tart
its taste he knows.
The lady, meanwhile, sober-tipsy makes gay mots
And plans new games, attentive that the pastime goes to no
decrease.
She turns to Kieu: 'Play for thy master some light piece!'
1850 To him: 'This wench is crammed with quaint proficiencies of
every kind ...'
The girl withdraws and joylessly begins, behind
An alcove-screen, to vivify her fingers, wind the
four-pegged lute,
Whence soon throed strings such crying, sighing sounds
transmute,
As might convert the brightest banqueteer to brute and utter
rue,
1855 Might by such merest gut and *woo-tun* wood imbue
With dread his deepest soul, though sought he to construe
in smiles his face.
Thuc's eyes (like those that glimpse love's coruscating
race,

- The rocky-coursing Tuong) well water, cheerless brace, new
spills unstay—
And once again Kieu feels the lady's pungent flay:
1860 'What murky pluckings mak'st thou there, on this occasion
of our cheer,
Insouciant wretch? Seek'st thou—delinquent—to endear
Thyself by this? Afflict no more our lord's mild ear or thou
shalt pay!
Inside the young man strain ten agonies, but they
Straight yield to gaieties that hastily convey the passage
through ...
- 1865 Thrice, by the dragon-headed water-clock, guard new
Had hailed guard old, and fresher, lightsome-seeming grew
Hoan's face, content,
She, that her secret glee should gain to depths late pent
In dole, now turned to gala-halls of merriment. While her
soul sang,
Thuc's wrenching entrails meted added pang on pang;
1870 Until at last, succumbing to contrary languors, now the two
To phoenix-room and common pillow-roll withdrew—
The goodwife and her mate—while Kieu the night-time
through must tend their lamp.
So—clearly now the bubbles show where fishes
camp.
Be there more weird, blood-troubled breeds than rancour-
rampant, jealous wives?—
1875 More prone to part kingfishers, mandarin-mate lives?
To trip the tryst of others' eyes and hands? ... What rives
for vainer bliss?
Thuc sags supine on spanless heights from Kieu's abyss,
So spent, she sees, his thousand troths shall not undistance
now their spheres.
Fate—rushpith-light a word that loads like lead man's
years

1880 With endless dues to freight the heart—will your arrears
resolve at last?

A fragile bark, launched wry, is straight to turmoil passed,
Where gales blow, billows break; to hopelessly dismast, tear
rope, overwhelm rail . . .

Kieu thus will brood, while nightly lamps shall smoulder, fail;
The oil by dawning, like her bating tears, slow-trailing to
sere cease.

XVIII

1885 For months Kieu's menial offices have no decrease;
Then chances she to meet her chatelaine, who, peace-
disposed, shows care
And Kieu's mood sounds. To what reply might Kieu repair?
'At times I'm troubled by my lot,' with listless air she owns in
fine.
Hoan later rallies Thuc to troll another line:
1890 'My dear, I'm certain you shall know how to divine her deep
desires ...'
Thuc blushes; then, aside, he inwardly suspires:
'Speaks pity here? What if this glimmer more bemires Kieu,
probing it?'
But she is told. Returning to that skill and wit
Which succored once, Kieu would again balm bane with
fitting penman's art.
1895 Anon, she takes to Thuc scrolled phrases that impart
How bloom-gay courts of youth once turned to marts of
barter, life for life:
Thoughts wrought to touch the conscience of the ladywife.
Hoan gives them brief attend—yet do their echoes
rifle aught from ease?
For when she hands the parchment back, 'Her talents please,'
1900 She says to Thuc. 'We should regret and raise her, reasoning
her state

Far else had been from this, did partly differ fate.
A mansion might have harboured her, a king's gold-gaited
 keep condign;
But such nice sail will ever jib upon the brine—
These gifted ones—whose subtile make hath oft them finally
 unmade.'

1905 'Indeed, life turns on grief.' Thuc's grant comes quickly yea'd,
'A favoured mind, the blushing cheek, alas, time's fading will
 negate;

All ages have such transience flattered to deflate:
Might not our softened hand, more placable in weight, help
 her endure?'

Then Hoan proclaims: 'Her late epistle doth adjure
1910 She be let pass through temple doors and in immurement
 ponder Cease:

A worthy thought; we shall conceded her that release,
Mayhap to halt her luckless cycles as a priestess of
 Quan-Âm,

The clement goddess sanctumed in our arbour'd cram
Of hundred-cubit *bodhi* trees, herb banks untrammelled
 by a burr,

1915 Hoar hillocks rocky-topped and tarns profound. To her
The girl shall that arcadia tend, and, tending, murmur
 taboured prayers!'

The morning firmament with earliest light enfairs;
Throng's candles bear, blooms, incense, tea and fruit:
 the wares of sacrifice.

Then Kieu attains the shrine: to vow submittal thrice,
1920 Recite the five world-abnegations that unsplice all laical ties,
And trade, last, her blue livery for patched nun-guise.
But now the canon deems she must again revise her name.
 New wrought,

Trac-Tuyen it chimes: Bright Source. To charge with
 hallowed thought

The holy lamps assist two altar-maids: Thu (Autumn)
and Xuân (Spring).

1925 Thus Kieu, whose feet now garland-growths
surrounding ring,
Will groom the Purple Grove, to artless things shall cling,
man shall she shun.

There, soul-abasing passions will abandon one,
And vanish shall the garish shams of rouge, whereunder
hides distress.

Before the Gautama she buries bitterness,
1930 Tangs nights with votive scents, by sacral copy-press
employs the day ...

A marvel are the mists that from Quan-Âm's groves stray,
That can so quench our mickle ardours, so low-lay terrestrial
needs!

~

Since Kieu first turned to contemplation's chestnut weeds,
The moon-car twice traversed the stellar-beaded meads that
part night's poles,

1935 While, ever watched, she strove to counterpoise two roles:
Of daily temperance in meets with pilgrim souls, and ...
nightly tears.

For from her chapel still Thuc's study near appears,
Though hopelessly remote as distant hill-frontiers,
far prefectures ...

And Thuc, too, daily swallows sighs, peers, mute endures ...

1940 Until one day the now dead dowager procures an
antic chance—

For with Hoan gone to give her grave wont maintenance,
Thuc makes a sudden crossing of the park-expanse to Kieu's
confine!

Now pours he forth at last the measure of his pine,

- While ceaseless tears bedew his scholar's gown, embrine his
blue-hued bib:
- 1945 'Self-judged I stand!—in love irresolute, unglib;
Unfit—ye stars!—to flaunt the bud I plucked for libertine
delight;
Unfit to flout the baited, baleful, dwelt-on spite
Of yon Madame! ... I—dastard!—might have scotched that
blight, but did not dare;
When we were doomed alike, I took of doom no share!
- 1950 Alas, that mire and dust bright jade should so impair, green
spring so sear!
I should have braved cascades, run rapids—but from fear
Nor fought nor made that lorn committal to sincere love:
sought its end! ...
But when born duties to ancestral shrines contend,
Demanding proper progeny, may one offend the stirp? ...
Yet shame
- 1955 Shall hang on me, who to this contract with thee came
Too blithe ... Stone wears, gold dulls, but no new guise
or name allays trust lost!
But she: 'A debile cypress skiff on surges tossed,
I, failing, found in fortune's unaccustomed fostering
this meed
Of calm asylum here. Relief did so exceed
- 1960 Past woes that, thought I, 'tis an omen I might lead
such other strays
To blissful shores, show how in still and simple ways
A troubled mind may mend ...' Here, though, a sad
smile plays upon her lips:
'Yet, once, ah me! the lute beneath these fingertips
Such glee made! Echo still our shared musicianship's
gay levities—
- 1965 And then their prompting call distracts from spirit's ease;
Then gratitude for peace becomes monotony's ingratitude ...'

And Thuc: 'I too have oft, alone, those joys reviewed,
And pondered shifts to circumvent a gall accrued in depths
 un gauged,
But thought: She late gave truce, would she be new-assuaged,
1970 New-roused? No—more malevolently, tightly caged would
 we two be!
Run thou, Kieu, fly, adventure some attempt and flee!
Our bond frays, and above me tops this apogee of adamant,
So regnant, sea to crest, that sink or climbing pant
I by her bid ... Aye, sad adieus must now supplant past faith
 for sworn ...
1975 Yet live I till streams dry and stone to dust be worn,
Love's silkworm-strand shall hold, to bear me till the bourn
 of Cease I've gained!'

Absorbed and twined in memories they thus remained,
Sigh following affecting sigh, and speech scarce waned
 new-swelled by speech,
While eyes held eyes and hands touched hands at parting
 reach ...
1980 Then whispers from a maid advised a hurried breach: 'Draw
 nigh ma'am's feet!
They stifled their dismay and postured well-discrete,
As, parting flowers, Hoan appeared with laughing, sweet
 halloo, to spill
Upon the silent Thuc the purlings of a rill:
'Our wan lord well seeks balm beyond his home! Much will
 restore him here!'
1985 He hastened forth a fraud that might suspicion clear:
'In random questing after herbs I happed to near her penning
 writ.'
Hoan's voice chimed cheer: 'A clever brush, hers, very fit
To be with concubine Lan-Dinh's erst prowess pitted, stroke
 for stroke.

- Alack that, lowly, nought but art might she invoke,
1990 Withal, a faculty whose merit may be brokered for
 pure gold ...'
 They drank a cup of bonze-brewed pickings of the
 wold,
And lightly thence the two, all tenderness-enfolded, gained
 their rooms,
Their glittering retreat ... Far else the girl—black gloom's
Despond was hers, presentiments of added dooms and novel
 woes!
1995 She hissed a question to the maid—'The mistress knows!'
 The answer came. 'Well hid, she swayed upon her toes
 a half-hour's stead,
 To mark thy finest hair and merest fabric-thread.
 She heard concluded every word, observed with dedicated
 stay
 Your fortunes' trials computed, tender passions' play,
2000 The anguish of the gentleman, his expirations
 from the heart ...
 She bid preveniently that I should stand apart,
 Then when her ear had surfeited her soul she started for this
 court.'
 Kieu listened, haunted by this tale of secret sport,
 And thought: 'Sure more such seed the devil's garden-hort
 can never shoot?—
2005 Audacious woman, and deep-vitaled too to boot! ...'
 The more she pondered direr quaked she, shallow-rooted
 slender spray:
 'Ah, subtle age of fiends and frauds! Ah, demon-day!
 And Thuc submits! She mouses him—a bailiff's prey, a poor,
 dunned wretch—
 In proof of how his reach is pent inside her stretch! ...
2010 When jealous blood wells up, most folk will scowl or fetch
 a snarl, their due;

But that one issues calm, to etiquette stay true,
Greets company with cordial mien, communes with you
quite pleasantly—
For anger shows the innards of the peasantry,
It seems—is adequately kind—but where none see, there coil
her snares!

2015 Now must those in precarious marts attend their wares!
Now glitter tiger-fangs, the crypts of serpent-lairs gape
everywhere,
And winged ones succour seek in altitudes of air!
Too lush the hedgerow's grown—the pruning knife to pare
it ready lifts!
But wait! ... fate floats a fern upon a stream, and shifts

2020 At will its swaying onward tends and random drifts: the fern
minds not;
Kieu, though, shall plan ... Yet fearful little does she wot
These lands, or, destitute, how by her fledgless plot for
freedom dub.
Her thoughts a time revolve around this vexing hub ...
Then—in the sacristy rest fine-worked, precious substances!
For fare

2025 She snatches up a brace, invests them in her wear,
And while the drummings of the night's third watch doom-
dare and echo-call,
Ascends she to the coping of a garden wall
And drops upon a path that moon-beams in their fall prolong
west-bound!

XIX

Lapse dim and endless *li* of sand-plain, coppice-ground,
2030 Faint cock-cries, moonlit watch-posts, slipped feet soft-
pounding footbridge decks,
Give night a vague succession ... Still the young dame treks,
And trekking dreads the road's contingencies, awed-recks
great nature's might ...

The dawn to hills embowered in mulberries brought light,
And Kieu no habitation saw where flagging flight might seek
repose;
2035 Until upon a ridge a wee pagoda rose,
Yclept *Submission's Seat*, as she discerned when closing with
the cell.

Her urgent tapping stirred the dreaming personnel,
And soon an old divine arrived to offer welcome and ingress,
For she saw Kieu, too, cowed in brown monastic dress.
2040 With kindness Credence (such was called the
prioress) restored her guest,
And sought the root and tip of her affairs; but, pressed,
The latter, doubting still her safety, thought it best to
thus reply:
'A humble sister from the capital come, I,

Although unworthy, have to Buddha's ordered guidance long
pertained.
2045 My prioress, whom I precede, comes yet entrained,
Though bear I talismans from her as might be deigned
at evensong
Soft consonance ...' and here she drew what nighttime-long
Had lain within her vestments veiled: a silver gong and
golden bell.
The nun examined them and said: 'She doth us well,
2050 Thine elder. Surely Constancy these bounties tell: my kind,
old friend.
But I regret her toil on paths that so sore wend,
And wish that thou wouldst wait to joy with me when end
her trekking days.'
So sheltered, Kieu embraced the sanctuary's ways:
Its simple salt-gourd fare, the matins in the haze of mountain
mists,
2055 Day-litanies and studies of the sutra lists
From fan-palm tomes, the joss-smoke offerings desisting not
by night,
Until above the Buddha-banderols the bright
Stars dimmed and dawn's one drum the cloisters heard invite
the day's ascent ...
Time drifted, Credence fancied Kieu nirvana-bent,
2060 And so indulged her that she soon all will has spent
to further flee.

XX

Spring's advent in the hills now specks each slope and scree
With buds; then, starlight-like, a petal-galaxy ignites the
ground:

A calm and cloudless epoch this, sweet days abound;
And comes a pious woman on her donor-round one holiday.

2065 She turns Kieu's rich gifts over with respect; 'But pray,'
Exclaims she next, 'these wondrous match those gone astray
late at the Hoan!'

Disquiet wakens in the artless mother-nun . . .

Will truth when tendered late make Kieu's erst urge
more understood or moot?

At even-hush she bares her saga's growth: from root

2070 In atavistic sin, to sprung misfostered shoot, to this new
node,

And sums: 'Your judgement must direct my further road:
Your Reverence can here a life emend or load with added ill.'

The nun grows pale, scarce half her senses serve her still
As sympathy and helplessness contend in willy-nilly sway;

2075 Until she stammers in Kieu's ear: 'Alackaday,
The Buddha's gate must ne'er them bar in disarray, whom
troubles tail—

But I foresee how foes might soon thee here assail,
And I, inept in worldly things, thy welfare fail when
woe draws nigh.

Child, therefore seek evading paths: fly!—doom defy!
 2080 I would thou stayed, but waiting for the flood shod dry—can
 that be wise?’

A clan of surname Bac live by, who sometimes rise
 To stock with oil and joss and pettyday supplies the cloud-
 girt shrine;
 Now called, they come, to begged be bend a kind incline
 Upon the luckless girl, befriend the vernal vinelet, shelter
 her.
 2085 Too-happy with their nod, to Kieu does not occur
 That those who heed defer against contentment err,
 that haste buys dear,
 That one might still make common with canaille out here—
 That Mother Bac could rank in Madam Tu’s career, by skill
 and school!
 Bac notes Kieu’s cheek flushed lucid-rose sans
 painting’s tool,
 2090 And calculates the clientele drawn fishy-foolish
 to the lure ...
 She first constructs a state of black suspense. Unsure,
 Kieu frets, succumbs to fears that soon in turn procure her
 old despair.
 The hag augments by grades the enmity-charged air,
 Till scowls and sullenness to full coercion flare: Kieu straight
 must wed!
 2095 For: ‘Thou, alone, ten thousand *li* from those thee bred,
 Art one moreover curst, whose presence erstwhile led to loss
 in those
 Thy nearest, least those far. What plagues may not impose
 The heavens on this house, that dares when all doors close
 to harbour thee?
 So see to splice the marriage-cable presently;
 2100 The heavens for thy feet no blissful path decree—I say
 avaunt

Such pickled hopes! ... But now ... no near or distant haunt
Of single swains yield fitting candidates undaunted by thy
 pride ...
Yet, one, Bac-Hanh, a nephew to this house, might bide ...
He's kin, an entrails-relative, no footless, brideless clod blow-
 by;
2105 He boasts a trading store below in county Thai,
Is straight and principled, abominates to lie or trusts
 betray—
Yes, here indeed my girl resolves the quest I say!
Once couched and covertured ye two may make your way
 to Thai's terrain:
And who shall fret thee there when those free lands ye gain,
2110 To rove o'er hill and river-reach, roam hinterplain and
 seacoast vast? ...
But listen girl—if thou opposest me at last,
Dissentest from this my dictate, on tears thou'lt fast: I bruit
 no brag!
 With pale and knitted countenance Kieu hears the hag
Speak drumbeats; falters she, feels every word an aggravated
 blow
2115 That quakes her, foot and wit, like earth's last overthrow,
And naught can rally but a sighful plea to slow the fate she
 fears:
'A wretch am I, poor prey, a swallow strayed from peers,
That's felt the hurtful hunter's bow and now slow-nears bow-
 seeming boughs;
But if constrained again by women's threefold vows
2120 To yield and wed, might I first estimate this spouse, first see
 his face?
The trade in tigers boxed is freighted with disgrace;
And wolves bought bagged—if one regrets the terms, their
 race ill-brooks dispute.
Should not a swain who prosecutes a marriage suit

- Step up to pledge his deathless constancy, refute the ribald
doubt
- 2125 Of vulgar men, secure dour gods by rites devout?—
Should love not auspicate the wed-craft, setting out on
changeful seas?¹
Bac plucks from impotence but this: the girl agrees—
And sallies forth to rouse the clan ... The wedding glee's
nigh; come, prepare! ...
The house is spruced, pots scrubbed, yard swept; and raise
they there,
- 2130 Without, an altar-board with tackle set for prayer.
And so begins
The rite: the new-brought beau bobs down, abjures the sins
Of days unwed, then mumbles oaths by kitchen jinns and
guardian gods,
As deem requires. Those protocols on outside sods
Then pass to curtained tracts, where he, soon sated, nods
and snoring lies.
- 2135 That dawn, all troop to where the marital boat ties;
The sail propitious spreads, and soon leaf-like it plies the
pair to Thai.
Upon securing at a tranquil harbour-lie
Young Bac sets off alone ashore to seek a bygone haunt
of his:
A jolly brothel-house, for such none else it is,
- 2140 A market trading flesh once more, and folk in business
selling folk,
Where prices turn on every gape and tweak and poke,
And profit pays ten times the tithe outlaid for brokerage
and freight.
Bac (so writ reads) has Kieu delivered in a crate
(Or jar), then takes himself away to some unstated latitude.

- 2145 The bearers halted by a terrace bloom-behued,
A crone bad Kieu be freed and called the dread-subdued girl
 come incline
A reverent kowtow before the household shrine—
To what but that same white-browed bust, the old divine
 of ribaldry!
Kieu, apprehending doom, thus in her heart keened she:
2150 'So, cageling, thou wouldst wing to heights, when earth wilt
 see thee closed stick?
Born damned, the bondmaids of the Peach Star's bailiwick!
We loose one knot, a net descends on us—stock-victims
 of high jest,
Doomed never to unriddle what gains gods their zest
For marring our short-flourished spectacle with pestilence
 and blight!
- 2155 So joys do ever ebb, so dark subdues day's light:
Like water ash-refined—the flagon tips, and bright to turbid
 turns!
The hoary Potter pugs and pummels, oft adjourns,
Shapes tardily his wares—that then the kiln-fire burns! ...
 Red-trousered clan—
A curse on us! With mortal might I sought fate's plan,
2160 Committed all to rectitude, for good abandoned home
 and kin—
But not from flush-faced youth yet proof to privy sin
Till now, and freshness daily leaving eyes and skin, have
 I found mend!
Well, fie! When virtue fails thus often to defend
Its drudges, then my remnant springs I'll elsewhere spend,
 and gains contrast!

XXI

- 2165 How many moon-dazed nights and fevered days thence
 passed ...
 Then one a-roistering from forth the southern
 vastnesses came there:
 His whiskers like a tiger's, beard a tern's tail-flare,
 Moth-brows, a giant's yard-broad trunk, the devil-dare
 that old knights wore—
 All predefined him battle-matter to the core!
- 2170 Tu-Hai this was: with fists or fighting-sticks or war of
 strategy
 Unparalleled; he deemed the world his fief, law-free,
 The clouds his cap, the earth his foot's subsidiary. From
 Viet-Dong came
 He, where he roamed the fens and gambolled with wild
 game:
 At hand to rove an oar; a sword his foes to tame; for love
 a lute.
- 2175 Disposed to savour parlour-fare he hears repute
 Of Kieu—and straight the fierce one falls to debile beauty's
 soft disports!
 No sooner has his name-card fetched her rose-hung courts,
 And eyes encounter eyes, than two such alien sorts
 compound one meld!

- Thus Tu: 'From this, we twain in one fused life are held,
2180 Not ours a passion likened to the fickle-dwelled vain wind
or moon!
Thou, lightning-eyed, though famed thy glance, none tells
its boon
Was ever yet upon a special consort strewn or paramour.
But do thou choose! ... Will fate again a real man's spoor
Trail here, and must thy compass know but cage-birds, poor
tame fish in tanks?'
- 2185 Kieu smiles: 'For those indulgent words, my lord, my thanks;
But how might such a thrall to night's invariant ranks
her court withhold,
Claim powers of discerning in them dross or gold,
And turn one here one there away with novel boldness,
where before
All owned succeeding passage through her open door?
2190 Though I, brought base, dare now detect a premium ore that
rare will cast ...'
- And Tu: 'A sentient speech, as fair as olden passed
From lips of confrere-souls to kings and nobly mastered royal
trust!
But delve again: I fear no prophesies that thrust
Inside this soldier's soul—and there thine own fate must thou
witness too!'
- 2195 Thus she: 'I see such guerdons as to risk accrue:
One day, on Tân-Duong, dragon-clouds shall rise to
view a coming king—
Help, then, a foot-unheeded herb, a feeble thing,
A trifling bubble haply floating in the ring of your great
grace!'
He bows, a well-pleased smile makes mild his fighter's face:
2200 'From birth to death how many intimates will trace one's
deep intents?
Those eyes be hailed that mark men's telling lineaments,

Distinguishing heroic vigours through rag-rents and under
grime:

Thou hast indeed exposed my soul before its time;
A duke's one thousand four-horse cars, ten thousand prime-
reaped stooks of rice

2205 Will pomp my realm one day—and thou shalt share! ...'

In nice

And in sententious sentiments and soft devices from love's
store

They bide; then Tu a panderess-ambassador

Secures to bear a bag of coins and void Kieu's former bill
of sale.

And made they their abode in an untroubled dale;

2210 Their bed was precious stuffs eight-veiled in Tao regalia,
cloister-screened,

Where potency to beauty nightly bowed bequeened;

The phoenix bore the dragon down, who undemeaned
succumbed, content.

~

Six months of passion ardent, pungent, pass so spent,

And then one dawn Kieu's consort wakens, snuffs a scented
by-borne breeze,

2215 Peers into mingled coastal skies and seeming sees

A sword, a saddled steed, and sights of valour teasing
of deeds owed.

Kieu speaks: 'Weak woman cleaves to man: such be
Writ's load.

If go you must, mean though I am to serve that code, I share
your heart

And beg to come.' Thus Tu: 'Attendant or apart,

2220 One soul we stay; could better braid us some uncharted toils
or harms?

The day I lead a hundred thousand men in arms,
When beating gongs shall shake the ground with
 dread alarms, when banners dense
Bedim the roads and cities tell Tu's eminence,
Thou shalt be borne to mine embrace and recompensing
 courtesies;
2225 But until then, unhoused upon the four far seas,
A woman's retinue must more impede than ease my chance-
 filled ways.
Content thyself to contemplate that day of days,
Triumphant come behind due risings, due decays, one year
 from this.'
Resolved, divesting with his robes connubial bliss,
2230 Tu roc-like, seeming winged with winds, departs
 to distal ocean-*li*.

Kieu watched now nights through panes pied by
 a prunus tree,
And daylong kept secluded vigil, silently from gate or door,
Until the stippled moss Tu's footprints overbore,
And wild grass stood yard-high and rank around
 the ornamental trees.
2235 She dwelt on home-catalpas, youthtime elms to ease
Her country-soul; or, glimpsing clouds, oft thought:
 now these must top far folk:
That gentle pair, the lily faded, cedar broke ...
Their stunned dismay, and longer grief: would time revoke
 those pains, assuage?
Sure with this grave decade now added to their age,
2240 Their faces, why! must bear the turtle's maculage, their brows
 rimed frost! ...
Or she would new-regret that first love sudden-lost
(For lote-stems snap, yet filaments may keep accosted stocks
 so twained);

But reckon next: another judgement, god-ordained,
Had long by now Kim's happy progeny sustained in
Vân's couched hands ...

- 2245 In pining for the odours of ancestral lands,
Or tracing treks and passions done, Kieu spends the
sands of abstract days.
She waits for Tu—gone goose-winged, dwindled, lost
in haze—
And scans the distance with a faithful, mournful gaze, as eyes
and morns
And seasons turn ... And now from far a murmur warns ...
2250 Then sudden war arrives!—to retch from neighbour-
bourns its flaming breath,
Discharging nightmare spirals of cremated death!
Now crocodiles rule rivers, dragons roads, by ethic of mailed
might!
Folk fleeing pause to shout that Kieu should join their flight,
Urge she remove herself a time, till draw these frightful tides
away ...
2255 But she declines: 'We pledged a meeting; I must stay;
However dire the hazards be, dare I betray our home,
my word?'

Yet lived she dreadful days, in turn fear-numbered, fear-
spurred ...

And then the first dark shades of battle-banners blurred
her trellised walk!

Drums snared, and armoured men with slow and mannered
stalk

- 2260 Her quarters girt—to preface their untutored talk with:
'Hail, Your Grace! ...'
Two files, ten generals in each, kowtowed full-face
Beside unbuckled swords and tasselled carapaces round
arrayed.

Next, palace maids—resplendent moons—their
charge conveyed:
'Our duty bids beg Madam come in cavalcade to her
high spouse!'

- 2265 A phoenix-panelled coach, corteged to wonder rouse
By honour-retinues of coifed and fulgent housecarls
robed in red,
Awaits her. Now, flags braced, drums throbbing, woodwind-
led,
Kieu's convoy pours upon the road; at rear, knights
sedant in gilt chairs,
And far before, a flambeau, herald-borne, prepares
2270 Massed throngs. They near the Palace of the South, where
squares tattoo parade,
Bright-pennoned ramparts roll a greeting-cannonade,
And from the portals Tu now rides, a prince of grade
to welcome her—
A ribboned, banded mandarin ... yet him aver
To be the man of yore his tern-tail beard and furry bombic
brows!
- 2275 He laughs: 'Must fish have seas?—so shall I hence me house
Within thy smiles! Retain'st thou yet my words, the trows of
converse past—
That greatness needs the great to recognise its cast?
Behold: remains here from thine oracles some lastmost lack
unmade?'
- Kieu thus: 'These wonders need no laud of mine in aid;
2280 Yet, as small vines will flaunt their shows beneath the shade
of mighty trees,
I boast: the world now bows when this your splendour sees,
But I esteemed its deep inaugural degrees when still to blaze!
With joy and wonder long they on each other gaze,
Then through a corridor of smiles to Tu's plum-baize
pavilions pass ...

2285 Ensee now banquets: chiefs trade honours, troops tip glass,
The war drums moderate their throb, the field band brass for
 pleasure plays,
And military meeds of wounds and wintry ways
New glory gain, to springtide turn and endless days of
 jubilee ...

XXII

As garrisons at rest met, reminisced heed-free,
2290 So too did Kieu in time renew the memory of wayward
 years,
In telling of Vô-Tich, Lâm-Tri and those far spheres
Where some had injured and betrayed her, some shown
 cheer's consoling face.
'But those uneasy days are gone, by heaven's grace,'
She said, 'though good remains unthanked and past pain's
 trace but part-dispersed ...'
2295 Tu listened, sore-restrained, until his wrath needs
 burst,
Then, fulminating thunder, damned the miscreants first, their
 blood and lair!
He bad crack captains ready troops and quickly rear
Flags ardent, fleet to race the comets of the air: peach-rose
 should be
Their hue of taintless ire! Let one grim corps straight see
2300 To fell Vô-Tich's ransackment; one, depraved Lâm-Tri with
 iron invest,
Till all whose pride or greed had Lady Kieu oppressed
Were yielded to him, yoke-constrained, for instant test
 of martial trial!
Two parting warrants else: Forbear to pour the vial

Of fury on Thuc's clan: with them Lord Tu's just bile declared
brief truce;
2305 Those rare two, Hoan-mère's stewardess, and nun-recluse
Kind Credence, also hither with polite inducements should
be won!
Last warrior-oaths exchanged and exhortations done,
All hearts now rallied in a rage to be begun and straight fulfil
The terrible and right effect of heaven's will! ...
2310 And netted deftly was the prey, like crabs caught milling on
a ledge.

~

Massed heavy phalanxes of sword and lance form edge
Around an open-ordered colour-guarding regiment: twin-
ranked,
That last, attentive, orderly, august. Arms banked
In brassy slopes divide the many-pennon-pranked and taut
parade.
2315 And now amidst this might a tiger skin is laid,
The regal pair to that stern portent are conveyed, take equal
seat,
While in the offing drums tattoo a fading beat.
As clerks prick lists and briskly steer the motley meet
to Tu's stockade,
Thus speaks that lord: 'For fair or evil work they made,
2320 Be heaven's hand thine, Kieu, to weigh them such a trade
as thou deem'st right.'
'Then lend me governance from forth your store of might,'
Asks Kieu, 'that I may in benevolence requite the kindly
flock,
And those once paid in turn for fee on evil knock.'
And Tu: 'Give judgment as thou wilt: benign or rock-like be,
my queen!'

- 2325 Grim swordsmen fetch first Master Thuc, his face
a sheen
Of inky sweat, trunk trembling like a wagtail weanling
caught by kites.
Kieu speaks: 'Do past repeated oaths to mountain heights
This face obtrude now on a disespousing wight's recall? Yet,
asked,
I own: disjunctive stars should ne'er have been o'ertasked
2330 To link our fates . . . Nor shall I have in vengeance basked.
Thou wert once dear—
Let then these hundred coiled brocades my debits clear,
These thousand pounds of silver too—faint love by gear
of glitter paid.
But of thy wife—that fiend of artifice hell-made—
This hour shall top the tale of how the drudge waylaid the
market-thief!
2335 That ant runs yet around the bowl, her time is brief;
The settlement when tyrant spite and helpless grief are quit
draws nigh!
Upon Thuc's visage fevers of confusion fly;
For through the scudding dread a glimmer glows, implying
joy he fain
(While bowing from the court) would wider uncontain:
2340 Joy for unthought deliverance . . . but, more again, for Kieu's
own rise!
They Credence call, and her once set to supervise
The thralls of mater Hoan. Their ancient dazzled eyes first
see a banc
That threatens doom—yet offers not to judge but thank!
'See, friends: Hoa-nô the slave, Bright Source, and I, by
prank of fate are one!
2345 O when I mind those days of misadventures done,
A hill of gold scarce buys the balm, dear dame and nun,
ye brought to me!

But both now take these chests of *lang*, though facile fee
 They be: pelf's thousands for gift-mites in penury but
 ill requite.'

The elders trade such looks as speak of doubting sight;
 2350 And then, once more, their aspects from alarm grow bright
 with surging joy!

Kieu takes their hands: 'Prolong your stay in this employ,
 Ye just, to witness how a glut of wrongs the cloyless sword
 amends!'

The guards unchain the charged, to make what futile
 fends

They might for manifest fell infamies. Ascends towards the
 court,

2355 Between filed flags, beneath bright sabres at the port,
 The first defendant: Hoan. She ends head-bowed her mortal,
 dread advance.

Towards her Kieu adopts a polished, distant stance:
 'Sure Madam hath been called to visit by mischance a scene
 like this?

A lady so endowed must step in here amiss,
 2360 Whose mien and mettle most become the haughty
 sisterhoods of yore;

For here mild ways behove the red-cheeked gender more
 Then high and captious mock—which aggravates the score
 of karmic woe!'

Hoan—wilted, dwindled, wan, her last conceits laid low—
 Prostrates before the pelt. Withal, her words a potent
 plea impart:

2365 'A wretched woman—thus of belly, womb and heart,
 And hence of jealous love—am I, like most, by artless
 passions gripped.

Yet now recall: when thou, with scribing holy script
 Displeased, offending fled, I curbed my ire nor slipt pursuit,
 thou'lt own,

- For in my middle heart esteem for thee had grown.
2370 When did one lightly care—in womankind unknown!—to
 share a spouse?
A wife must set what thorns will serve . . . Then pity rouse
For circumstance, O woman—hence ill-fit to douse our
 fevered schemes!
Kieu looks and nods: 'He judges verily who deems
Thee subtle-tongued: thou wouldst soon sue with song the
 themes of thy dire case.
- 2375 Let thy throed soul forgiveness like a burr embrace;
For to condemn, a tale of countervailing grace would with
 thee die.
Thou dost enough effect thine own distress. Good-bye!
Without!—let know the servers of these dooms that I dismiss
 her free!
Beneath the sky's wide-witnessing Hoan's form bends knee.
- 2380 Restraining gates again disgorge, and more of misery
 draws near,
That Kieu must cry: 'By all high heaven's stellar tier,
The law of equity for evil done makes here a cruder claim!
The first to plead are nephew Bac and Bac the dame,
Then bend Hound, Hawk and So-Khanh, confreres
 in ill-fame, petitioning,
- 2385 Then Tu and Ma the press of their appealing bring—
But fie that miscreant crew, what mercy might their mingled
 clamour gain?
For such the tools of executioners obtain:
As were their treacheries distinct, so shall their pain
 be multiform!
Blood bursts, flesh flies in shattered gobs—a slaughter-storm
- 2390 Ensues which leaves those watching dread-undone and
 gormless with disgust!
 Thus countless crimes are capped by this decretal just
And heaven-sealed: In time's redress, the deeds thou dost
 due ends await!—

And when a faithless, cunning man confronts his fate,
We rightly with the gods decry that reprobate his begging
call.

2395 The hushed mass drawn about the tiger pelt each fall
Of judgement marked, delivered under skies high-vaulted,
diamond-bright.

When meed in due had thus been meted every wight,
Nun Credence craved her leave, and that she purseless might
resume life's course.

Thus Kieu: 'Alas, that time from its millennial source
2400 So scantily gives, and friends must soon forego such morsel-
spans of cheer.

A floating frond but meets a mirrored cloud—straight veer
They each its way. Do flown cranes twice on wolds
appear?—doth mountain mist?'

The nun thus: 'Yet we part to greet again; for list:
Our paths when five twelve-months have passed shall join
from distant bourns! ... I mind

2405 One journey's close and weary passage left behind,
With wise Tam-Hop I dwelled, who reads the web and wind
of all events.

She augured you and I would meet amid intents
So rare as to reflect these present wonderments—
for she of this

Day's deeds spake too. If this told meeting did not miss,
2410 Then sure the promise of the next must that elicit to its
draw?

We bear causation's links in us; great karma's law
Sets our affinity: why haste to think its awesome dealings
done?'

'If all is sequence fixed ...' Kieu mused, 'then such a one
Who kens time's mysteries may well from trains begun
ends apprehend ...'

2415 Then: 'If before our tryst thou shouldst meet more thy friend,
Do ask her how she sees my further journey's wend; I would
fain learn.'

The nun made glad assent ahead of that return,
Then stepping forth for distant sweeps, beyond a burn was
quickly gone.

~

Since Kieu had lately settled heaven's judgement on
2420 The upright and the base, her dole of karmic bondage
seemed to bate,
And knelt she now before great Tu duke-potentate,
Rejoicing: 'Ne'er did bud or willow-leaf dilate to such a day!
Betrayers by thy thunders have been blown away!
This inch, this grain of sand, once overborne now savours
ease, is free;

2425 Would that a script upon this heart, these bones, praised thee
When else of me shall clay become and voiceless be,
so thanks ne'er cease!'
Thus Tu: 'Among the great, asleep within time's peace,
How many by such worth as thine gained fame's increase,
my second soul?
And where did chroniclers of deeds salute the role
2430 Of knights who sighting slighted excellence and doleful
need recked not?
And, too, thy home-concerns remain a present blot:
Sweet, stay thy thanks until to praises better-gotten I can
bow;
This rift from folk, this rueful circumstance long now
Necessitating that they live in Tân and thou in Viet—so far,
2435 A thousand *li* between each domicile—a jar
To pleasure proves, and shall if unamended mar our rightful
rest.'

Withal, in time that purpose slumbered less professed,
While drank the great brigades and reveled in attest to evils
quelled ...

XXIII

Cane splits, a roof-tile slips, and soon these starts are swelled
2440 To clefts and avalanches: Tu's decline is held in such descry.
His beetling court, abutting on the angled sky,
Bestrode an amplitude of half the lows and rises of the land:
Glee's font ... or vault whence windy war might soon
expand—
As oft indeed it did: five castled counties standing fell
to naught
2445 Before the whistling turbulence by Tu's blade brought.
(Brought barbed: 'Such coat-racks, rice-bag-bellies, chaff,
so fraught with fleas the foe ...')
Tu wide could arc his eyes round southern tracts and know
Of only vassal chiefs ('My waifs and widows ...') owing him
their weal,
And none who dared oppose his flag by arms' appeal.
2450 Five virile years he domineered by fear or fealty
that domain,
Until the time of Hô-Tôn-Hien's historic gain
To viceroy's rank (by steady sap of peers obtaining that).
Hô's star
Was high: the emperor himself 'had pushed his car'
To start him south with furnishings to slaughter, char
and pacify.

- 2455 Full well Hô knew Tu's martial worth; but, too, that night
By him in councils Kieu had precedence to ply her woman's
ken.
To vanity Hô turned, and cantoning his men
He sent grand gifts to Tu, and from the king a tender father's
call;
While specially for Kieu, to tempt her fancy's thrall,
2460 Two lady-servants royal-reared and chests withal of gems and
gold,
The which if taken Tu's enfeoffed submittal told.
Tu checked his scorn while verities as these enfolded
him in thought:
'A lad alone and by this hand my lot I wrought;
Unglib, I've sailed the coasts of So; free-ranged, untaught,
stream-furrowed Ngô:
2465 What should become of me at court? I would there gnaw
My fettered heart, be one more yielded rebel, awe-struck,
staring-lost,
To stump about in gaudy ribbonries criss-crossed,
A count or duke, yet hourly bound to those who tossed that
boon, so-called.
Can that compare with these wide lands enjoyed unthrall'd,
2470 These walls that have alliances of foes appalled and seen turn
tail?
I elbow earth and sky and need heed neither rail!
Who lords me from some eminence and makes me quail
beneath his frown?'
- Far else the bent of Kieu, invited to renown,
In whom her bland new maids' sweet ruth and kindest
counsels vivify
2475 Old aches, now dwelt on thus: 'A floating stray am I,
Long drifting, floundering, coned vortices surviving, tumbled
waves;
And here this royal pledge a splendid highway paves:

Defined, formed, smooth as throne-room silk, as straight
as staves—distinction's trail,
Whereon we'd serve the common weal, our own avail.
2480 And then, one day, it might so pass, my home I'd hail,
retainer-flanked,
A stately lady, consort to a hero ranked,
To meet with festal face my folk—the throne be thanked
which grants that joy!
Then would I render king and kin adept employ,
And keep the writ: Serve thou the realm and its alloy,
the family!
2485 Is that not better than this tossing on the sea,
A restless sail that waits some wave's finality to end its
throes?'
They bobble their debate on tidal neaps and lows,
Wherein Kieu's earnest points of reasoning proposing cede
are these:
'The emperor's largesse hath settled on grandees
2490 And low alike, made livable the land like season-breaking
rain;
His peace is couched in strength, and strength in good again,
Such that all wear contentment like a festive train on cape
and cap.
Think though: since thou first smote with sword on hostile
knap,
Head-high heaped bones and Tartar Vô-Dinh's bloody-
lapping river banks
2495 Thy name hath wide evoked. Shall men concede thee thanks
When years anon they tell of thee? Who now rogue franks
like Hoang-Sao hails?
The road to civil life and worth the king avails,
To licit wealth, to generations of entails and heirs' acclaim!

Confused by such complaints, in time Tu's actions tame:

- 2500 He nulls his planned attack on Hô, in virtue's name would
talker turn
And deems his brawlings done. The prince's envoys learn
That Tu shall lay his armour by and sans adjourn disband
his horde.
With faith in oaths late-sworn beneath the castle-
ward
Flags listless droop, scant sentinels their rounds record
on flaccid drums
- 2505 And military business to caprice succumbs—
While Hô's staff spy, and grimly plot the battle-sums
from what they scan.
The prince conducts those customs aptest to his plan:
A pageantry of gifts conveyed through furled war-banners
rapt employs
The cozened gaze, his legates lasting concord noise
- 2510 And bob and bow before—while unobserved armed foisons
form a-rear.
And now Lord Tu, composed, as ever without fear,
Steps from his strong portcullis, soft-attired, draws near
as friend to friends.
Hô nods—his men unfurl again the flags, and ends
There guile! Fire bursts from main and flanks! ... A column
bends to circumscribe! ...
- 2515 A time needs come, unheralded, to cull the tribe
Of tigers too; when even bears from blood-imbibing sink
in dearth.
But Tu before he fell to feed on meddled earth
Did long affirm in fray what bellies by their birthright
warriors bear ...
The moment came; his spirit passed to heaven's care;
- 2520 But still that mountain-body stood, implanted there,
beringed by foes,

And moved not, as if built in bronze, beyond men's blows
To topple ... Shaken, torn at, dreadful qualms imposing, still
he stood.

The beaten fled, imperial troops plied hill and wood
And spared none, till the reeking smoke of slaughter hooded
all the sky.

2525 Mid choked-up moats and ramparts fallen some ran by
From Tu's disordered troop, who grasped Kieu's hand to pry
her from the wrack;
But where penumbral missiles hailed unslaked attack
About Tu's form (outlined perdurably aback to heaven's blue)
She stopped and sobbed: 'Hast thou then—brave,
frank-souled, word-true—

2530 Hast all thy chivalry been crowned through rash
concubinage by this?

Now must I draw the world's derogatory hiss,
Bear time's contempt—O better both to death's abyss had
sunk today!

And grieved she till she showed all autumn's disarray,
Stormed, wept by streams ... then dropping spent, she
swooned away upon that ground.

2535 And, thus is said, their tragic souls so close proved bound,
That only now did Tu beside where she had foundered fall
at last.

A squadron from the conquerors patrolling past
So found her prone, and, though yet death-exultant,
mastering blood's bent
They bore her, listless, to their overlord's field-tent.

2540 Prince Hô peruses her, asks kind things, then thus gently
deigns to speak:

'Thou frail, unworldly dame, thy delicate rose-cheek
Hath felt the searing engine-breath of battle wrecking
its mischance;

Yet, know, thou stayed more bloody toil by thine erst stance,
When to our stratagems of state thy tongue's enhancements
then thou lent.

2545 And now all effort to those peaceful ends being spent,
Demand the measure of whatever settlement thy heart deems
due.'
Kieu hears, and faster stream her cheeks than
hitherto,
Distraught and stumbling at the start she pours with pluvial
rush her soul:
'Lord Tu was of the stapled great, a hero whole:
2550 The wide sky's kin, he roved the earth and knew no
dole upon the sea,
Nor found aught false—then met this fate in trusting me!
Survivor of a hundred battles, he, bent-knee, would yield
his court,
Induced by one he called his co-soul to consort
With specious honours. Who could think yon torn,
contorted flesh and bone,
2555 That in a thrice turned thus, was he. Supreme, alone,
He deathless seemed, from some half-godly interzone; and
now is naught.
Think you this cataclysmic wrack for pay was wrought?—
What comfort's pelf? O that oblivion might be bought, that
gold shrift gained—
For now I see I ever worthless was, sin-stained,
2560 And ill and vain lived life, which ought when so disdained
end by this hand.
But let me beg some hidden bank of river-land
To lay him in—though heart-borne, here, his erstwhile
grandeur shrined I'll keep.'
On Hô's smooth face faint skeins of discomposure
creep;
He utters hests, and Tu's remains are brought to sleep beside
a spring.

XXIV

- 2565 The flushed, triumphant legions turn to revelling
And feast, to luted, piping levities and singing mensal cheer,
Where Kieu needs serve behind the pot-booth screens, give ear
To drunken calls for birds-nests! wine!—till some would hear
her pluck a reel . . .
She plays: the measure breaks on them a fearful
peal—
- 2570 Four strings, five trembling fingers wreak such joy-
congealing cries, stir care,
As gibbon-grief or locust-keen alone compare;
So that, through stillness now attained to him, yon air nigh
draws Hô's tears,
And nearing he exclaims: 'What lay is this one hears,
That manifests ten thousand banes and fainting fears
and sorrows so?'
- 2575 Thus Kieu: 'I call it *Love and Chance*, that some may know
From long-gone days when I was fond of setting poems
to the lute.
Its wan appeal seemed then a girlish soul to suit,
But never did it truly toll the destitute till this hour came.'
He listens, urgings rising, gazing grows a-flame,

2580 And as he speaks new-dips that mask of steely lame, grows
 hunger bared:
 'Sure scents of frankincense in some past life we've shared?—
 Together by roc blood the mystic lute repaired in that
 divide? ...'
 Vain ring her pleas: 'A vagrant wretch, no man's fit bride
 Fate bad me be—and latterly a homicide. You'd add more
 woe?
2585 Of young buds' graces few the weary remnants show—
 Torn lute-strings serve indeed for such as I, betokening
 frayed life;
 Take pity on a helpless stray! The smell of strife
 And ashes taints me ... O that sweet home-elms could stifle-
 o'er the stench! ...'

 The dawn sees Prince Hô leave her, better-governed wretch
2590 His late-strayed self to sense and thoughts on how to quench
 and overwhelm
 The night's incaution: for his station in the realm
 Is ringed by those whose calumnies might mar his helm and
 founder him.
 And then, is his a nature for a moonlit whim?
 So, now, how might this matter be conducted trimly
 to a close?
2595 That morning's muster for commanders' orders shows
 A timely way to turn the matter and compose it with
 dispatch:
 A backwoods chief has served the crown—let valour's match
 Be beauty's blush, a rose to thread his homely thatch with,
 that bold thane!
 O god of nuptial twinings, tangled is thy skein;
2600 How maladroit thou splicest strands, and thy disdain how oft
 shows stark!
 A chair takes Kieu to board the wild one's home-bound
 barque,

Where curtains drop on execrable things, more dark than
outer night ...

~

The tide returns around the reed debris and blight...
Where petals opened hundredfold, will one yet bright and
dewed distil

2605 A tear? ... Best that upon Kieu's body great waves spill,
That sands subhume, null, all essays, all render nil, for hope
is dead.

Yes, best to drift a time and find in seas outspread
To all infinity a cantle for a bed to lay her bones.
Love; silk threads; vows ... what timeless debts, what
unbeknowns

2610 Words hide. What ancient shame or breach that naught
atones, what charge untold
That we for ever pay, then evermore behold
In sooth unpaid. Enough. Existence which each older
day annoys
More mortally, a livelong desert bare of joys,
Needs see in death no special pass: a moment's poise
to betterment ...

2615 By such a hundred roads of bitter discontent
Kieu ponders on, and dreary prospects all present. The boat
makes way,
Behind the hills night's sentry lifts his lanthorn-ray,
And by that sickle-gleam she treads the deck, slow-swaying
to each turn.

Then from ahead is heard a tributary churn,
2620 And voices say that Tien-Duong's flows coil there. Kieu,
learning this, feels press
Of some once-uttered distant words, a dream's address—
Which now unerringly grows plain: her toils' last lessening
lies here!

- Dam-Tien, then, smiling sisterly, must tarry near:
Awaits foreknowing to regale with bottom-cheer her jolly
 guest ...
- 2625 Inside, the lamp illumines a page of petals pressed:
Kieu pens a verse, and even at that parting test her hand
 writes well.
 Beyond the cuddy door, outside upon the swell,
The moon has dimmed and sky and water arc one shell
 of cobalt hue.
She thinks: 'How kind in his intents was once Lord Tu,
2630 And I, unworthy heart, betrayed him, greedy grew for toys,
 ingrate.
One spouse but killed, straight wedded to this savage mate!
Frauds ... failures ... frays ... indignities—prolong thy hate
 on others, world,
But be this narrative to ending death now hurled:
My soul to heaven I commit ... to thee, the knurled-flank
 flood below!'
2635 Around the boat more countercurrent mutters grow:
Kieu headlong hurls herself most middleward, where cloven
 glints the course.
The chieftain-spouse, unapt to pluck her back by force,
But glimpses last his new-got treasure trove remorselessly
 down drawn ...
 Alack, another life, a victim, fortune's pawn,
2640 That once was brilliance, grace—so spent. A pretty dawn
 that day profaned
By brutal storms ... Might others longer have maintained
Kieu's burden, borne that exile's saga uncomplained, have
 suffered more?
For fifteen years she held a mirror up before
Her peers, red-trousered womanhood, to show abhorrent
 hues smirch bright;
2645 And now, at last, how weak ones win in hopeless fight.

XXV

Yet wisdom states that *yin* and *yang* reign twins in might
and counterpose,
And righteous folk who grieve beneath misfortune's blows
Are known to heaven, where a sum of pity grows through
reckoned spans . . .

Departing Kieu, nun Credence turned again to plans
2650 Of pilgrim treks on cloud-wreathed paths, two betel-pans
her chattels whole.

In time she met Tam-Hop, and with that godly soul
Kieu's manifold dire history discussed, unfolding one
deep doubt:

'Here be a paragon: child, woman, scarce without
A reprimand; and yet, withal, is torment-routed still. Why so?'
2655 Spake thus the seer: 'What heaven metes, termed weal
or woe,

Decree we such, by our own worldly measures growing from
the heart.

But providence gave human choice a larger part:
Man may by turning from world-sways commence his start
from victimhood.

The girl was given wit and much hath understood:
2660 That beauty's rose must bide rough winds and be denuded
in due turn;

But she hath clung to earth-bound dreams, to thus unlearn
Relinquishment; and so, self-willed, shall longer earn
this-worldly cares.

Part cognizant of passion's tides, part unawares,
Her yearning, stubborn heart oe'rleaps our lore, oe'r bears
it and prevails:

2665 Whereby each deed, her best, her worst, distress entails.
Fiends shun still souls. Yet while she twice assumed travails
of disrepute,

Twice more did don a slave-domestic's azure suit,
She nourished imps of pique and pride, trod karma's route
self-galled toward

Despair, to quail below poised lance and lifted sword;
2670 Till, serving wolves and tigers, fearful for their mordant,
glinting teeth,

She needs must choose the flood, the tossing wave, beneath
Become a prey for dragon-fish in new, dark, etherless wild
deeps—

Thus always with world-love world-death a compact keeps,
And knowing with our sensing souls the headlong steps of
that conjoint,

2675 We fret through vagrant lives and reckless ends appoint,
Supposing that our deaths might finally aroint unhappiness.
Here Credence queried, stirred by hope, the
prophetess:

'Then Kieu shall have continuance?—but no redress? no
grief's remit?'

Tam-Hop replied: 'Be cheerful still, for holy writ
2680 Instructs that karma's reckonings may link and fit facts
manifold;

And when Kieu's restless life in times to come is told,
It shall be deemed she loved too well, but not as bold,
debauched ones do.

A daughter's heart repaid its filial debit's due,

By that most abnegating sale of self, which viewing heaven
praised:
2685 On that shall ponder generations yet unraised.
She felt the twisted codes of earthly rule, their mazed here
yea there nay:
Are many tested of their essence so today?
To former sins our calm good will and cleansing labours lend
some ease,
And have been known before this day to so appease
2690 The gods that they have doled us ken as partly sees the
peace of yon.
Dear friend, dost thou mind yet thy pact with Kieu,
times gone?
Then float from Tien-Duong shores a welcome-craft
whereon thou'lt cause to be
Confirmed what mine old eyes were given to foresee—
For heaven's will needs man ...' she smiled mid gravity,
'to will it done.'
2695 Tam-Hop's wise solace reconciled the goodly nun:
She found beside that curving watercourse a sunny,
soft-grassed patch,
There wove a wattle-frame and trussing stopt with thatch,
And sat to watch the sky-blue band on whose glint-catching
swells clouds swayed.
Two fishermen were articulated and yearly paid
2700 To tend a raft of reeds, and daily by their trade the flood
was seined;
So that at last, unforced, the grand intent was gained,
The miracle matured to meet its preordained and cyclic ide.

~

Since Kieu had sunk beneath the surge that eventide,
More tempered drifts conveyed her, lulled, to mellow,
wide-wave river lows,

2705 Where netted now and raised to light she gladdened those
 Who yearned to see Tam-Hop's great ponderings disclose
 their pith of truth.

Here, sodden on their deck she lay, educing ruth,
 But though bedabbled by paludal daubs how couth
 the mirror shone!—

For all beheld the pristine Kieu, albeit upon

2710 A dream-charmed, dream-tormented countenance
 they fondly, gravely gazed.

In cassia groves and dim plum bosks Kieu's spirit, dazed,
 Seems of a sudden Dam-Tien's shape to see, upraised
 from distant days,

Who says to her: 'Expectant faith's perpetual stays
 Have kept me here to count the seasonal decays of
 many years

2715 To tell thee this: a balm for many prove thy tears,
 And those whose sacrifices pay their sins' arrears shall
 call thee peer.

Thy noted loyalties the highest gods endear;
 Thy sorrows gotten from self-sale, to thee severe,
 have kindred saved,

And guide to selflessness of broader kinds. Now, laved

2720 By weeping, former evils fade. Thy name engraved upon
 the vanes

Of heaven's Wheel of Tribulations also wanes.

Take back these canticles of transient joys whose strains thou
 scribed of old,

To mind them new when halt thy trials and calm times hold:
 For now distressful cycles nigh conclude and golden
 days await.'

2725 While yet perplexed by dictions dreamt or half-
 dreamt late,

Kieu hears a call—*Bright Source!* Quiescence stirs; abate those
 dreams; unyoke

Restraints and spells her mind can scarcely soon invoke
In waking. Dazed at first, she peers through mists that smoke
with shapes unknown
(Dam-Tien, if once a presence on that craft, has flown);
2730 But Credence now to Kieu's restoring sight is shown ... and
joyful flare
Their cheeks, a thousand tears deliverance declare!
The raft is raised, the nun would have that Kieu
should share her straw abode ...
And live together they, their weal the lightest load
Of zephyrs, moonlight, fasts and herbs: a nature-code that
cleanses clear.
2735 Around, the universe revolves its slow career,
Presenting tides to contemplate, and stars to peer at through
cloud-frames,
And time to flush away the blemish of old shames.
And erstwhile claims of love? Well, who might pose
those claims in this far place?

XXVI

While Kieu endured the crooked courses of her race,
2740 The woes of young Kim-Trong were due to gather pace,
as now we learn.
From setting out to threnodise his uncle's urn
In Lieu-Doung, norwards countless leagues, to his return,
six months have passed.
He quickly scales his old kingfisher's perch at last,
His wonted peak-vedette of yore, and sees—disastrous
scenes unknown!

2745 The garden yon sprouts grass and sedge by nature sown,
The window where Kieu moonbeams caught is lichen-
grown; its weathered wall—
An age has seen no human shadow on it fall!
Some buds still prank the hair-pin tree where Kim made call,
still speck small smiles,
But swallows flutter through the vacant mansion's aisles,
2750 And weedy verdure, vestiges-consuming, piles and snarls the
ground ...
He prowls her garden-pale—its paths can scarce be found.
The ranges of their world those seasons past are wound
about with thorn,
And keep such stillness as would sense to trance suborn.
Will any ease him of this daze ... this dread ... this
mourning? Whom to ask?

- 2755 A burgher from the neighbourhood comes by. Kim's task
Proves delicate indeed: to trove in winter's cask for remnant
fruit.
Vuong *père*? It seems he'd gotten tangled in a suit.
And Kieu? They say she sold herself in disrepute to save
old Vuong.
The family? Departed to new climes, gone long.
- 2760 The young ones too? The whole collection there
gone wrong, their lot now one
Of penury, despondency and lives undone;
One sews by piece-work, one turns texts: in short, they none
but keep alive ...

Each word a bolt like sudden thunder's downward drive
From peaceful skies struck Kim and soulwards seemed
to knife, so that he shook.

- 2765 He weakly asked if one might know whereat to look
For those sad emigrants ... and set to seek their nook
of settlement.
A dirt-walled hut he found, more derogation lent
By scraps of screens and rotted stakes that partly pent a yard-
surround
Of little more than weed-grown, water-sodden ground.
- 2770 A time he conned that dismal scene, with wonder bound,
until perforce
He needs hollo across the sagging wattle-course.
With haste young Vuong ran out to see the summons'
source—then, joyous boy,
He gripped Kim's hands and drew him where the rest his joy
Now joined, the old pair groping, radiant-eyed, with toiling
pace to him!
- 2775 Then how they cried, recounting their decline to
Kim:
'Conceive, young man, the stings of chance, the noxious
whimsies we've endured—

- What wry a road the heavens have our Kieu procured!
Too soon doom bade the bond between ye be abjured and
altered quite,
The day the house of Vuong met grief which none
could right
- 2780 Unless her self-sale rendered ransom that it might thereby
be saved!
Distraught she stood, about to leave, and selfless craved—
Yea, with a multitude of terrors to be braved, thus did
adjure—
That mate for mate we should a wife for thee secure:
And namely to discharge that sacred role none purer could
depute
- 2785 Than this her sister Vân as partial substitute—
For, such a breach a score of wives could scarce be utilised
to mend!
She said, "My bridal-oath betrayed, I hence shall bend
Before death's tribune pledged to be Kim's wife-intended
next-come life!"
Her speech was with such urgent parting suasions rife
- 2790 As etched recall upon our hearts, where now each trifle
wrings regret . . .
Lamentable thy fated lot, Oh Kieu, ill-met!
Here be thy swain returned, but thou, dear child, must fret
in what far pale?'
The couple's woes inflamed with their unfolding tale,
Whilst Kim to pallor lapsed and showed as one worse-ailing
with each word—
- 2795 Till at a sudden dropped he on the floor, then stirred
To flail, pour torrentine hot tears, grow still, engirded now
in trance,
Then newly fell to fits, relieved by swoons perchance,
That woke, with sense returned, more tears and sharper-
lancing grief again!

- Old Vuong, that he might further such wild throes
restrain,
2800 Sought easing sooths, and kept his own paternal pain
for now curtailed:
That plank is fastened to another hull, now sailed;
Man must accept his lot, repining grasps that failed
makes grow no reach;
Excessive want is earthly-burdensome we teach;
Gain gold of youth!—why but a bud from time beseech,
which one day bides? ...'
- 2805 They try to coax Kim's humours from a hundred sides:
His dole endures, seems now to smoulder now with tides
of fire to flare;
For can he rest, when here Kieu's golden bangles bear
Her memory, or there her lute, dear trinkets, fairings,
redolent
Of vow-affirming incense, stir him? Pangs unspent
2810 His liver ever vex, his innards' core torment; barbed thoughts
berate
And taunt him: 'Mindlessly didst thou then ambulate
In far domains, while here a water-fern was freighted off
to doom!
So much for pretty rhapsodies in some gilt room
To stone-like, bronze-like constancy—vain sport and spume,
vain, vacant air! ...
- 2815 But no! Though curtained couchings shared we not, a pair
We be—our hearts were ne'er disposed to lightly care
or trust betray!
Let cost or toil attain what magnitudes they may,
I shall not rest nor find contentment till a day unites us two!'



Though infinite the grief youth's tragedies accrue,
2820 In time Kim found some comfort working to renew
 the Vuong's old home.
He doggedly restored and garden-girt that dome,
Then brought the venerable pair, and from the moment
 settled there
Afforded them that filial keep, that cordial fare
At dusk and morn akin to Kieu's perennial caring,
 seasons past.
2825 He set to search for her with long-unlessened last,
Wet ink-stones with his tears, had missive-soundings cast and
 couriers sent,
And much of treasure and of energy he spent
In trekking to Lâm-Thanh. (On sullen seas he went
 those many miles
To seek her there, when she was far elsewhere the whiles.)
2830 But vast and void the quest remained, and many trials
 to sorely learn:
How yearning gives to grief, and grieving goads to yearn,
How torments grate and pining saps, how one's internal
 skeins are wound
Then flag: as silkworms wane, their organ-webs unbound,
Or late-cicadas, winter-struck, when lapse to soundlessness
 their choirs ...
2835 Bereft of will and half-unheeding Kim retires
To bloodshot plangency, in listlessness immires and maggot
 dreams—
Which sore alarm his kin to whom such absence seems
Infirmary: who knows those whims to what extremes might
 lead him soon!
They hasten to decide a day of astral boon
2840 When Kim and Vân might braided tread their bloom-
 bestrewn connubial way.

And so it passes: grace, school-skills of sound cachet,
Sweet maid and youth of parts now find one fated day their
lots entwined,
And Kim contentment meets, and grows more life-resigned.

And yet, wed-days do seem too much to prank in mindless
furbelows,
2845 And he, in genteel heed, in rote domestic shows,
In fond embracing with his bride, yet senses glows from
ardours past:
Reminding glimmerings of something splendid cast
In erstwhile years. And then a silken collar fastens round
his heart,
And he seeks out his scroll-room, sits by hours apart
2850 Beside the incense-brazier, plucks the fretted art of some
gone day.
And as the silk strings sing their low, lamenting lay,
And ethers drift the santal-smoke and gently sway a bamboo
blind,
It seems then that soft calls of banter laughing find
Him from the rooftrees, or a shadow on the vined verandah
bates ...
2855 Thus melancholy prints like signet jade its traits
On thought and sense: for oftentimes Kim populates
his trances so.

~

So spinning days and nights towards oblivion flow,
And seasons bare-remarked succeed each other's going and
return.
Vuong-Quan and Kim go back to books, and one day learn
2860 Their names share stone with past surmounters of the
sternest civil tests!

Gape heaven's gates—the palace hosts them devoirstests;
Beck ministries; bewreathed, they feast as village guests
on pathways home ...

Young Vuong, to be relieved of memory's grim gloam,
Commits himself to square with ancient Chung the tome
of former debts

2865 By marrying his child, and with that contract sets
In joyous joining of their clans on old regrets a final seal.
Kim takes to other, cloud-high deeds of state that deal
With brother-mandarins and plans of social weal ...

Yet Kieu and care

Recur. Was it not she with whom he meant to share

2870 This entry to jade halls, through such gilt doors as flare
wide open now?

He sees her drift beneath a wave's avertless prow,
A fern-sprig lost, a prostrate thing; while here mid bowing
throngs reigns he ...

Then came assignment to an outer post—Lâm-Tri.
He trekked with kin and retinue those weary *li*, to live
sloth-rife

2875 Long years the lute-accompanied official life
Of idle courts; bored, ever-heeding to the fife of
homing cranes ...

One night Vân lies reposed behind the arras-panes,
When lo! her sister smiles ... Vân wakes to dream-remains
that feel of flaw

In settled things ... She turns to Kim with trembling awe.

2880 But he perceives the sign as urging him to draw new
hope about

Kieu's nearness ... Then—*Lâm-Thanh* ... *Lâm-Tri* ...
The blunder's out!—

How those banal last syllables the secret shout!—O vain-
toiled youth! ...

This meet of sister-souls may mean the long sought truth
Of things lies here; and haply from the gods new ruthfulness
imports!
2885 That day Kim delves among the yamen's scribal
courts,
And hears this from an ancient of the record-orts, one
surnamed Dô:
'My lord, these memories from ten-some years now draw,
But I did follow at the time that wayward story of ill-fame.
A Mistress Tu 'twas then in bawdry made her game,
2890 When one day her man Ma as wont from Bac-Kinh came,
transporting here
A girl called Kieu, adjudged a talent none to near,
Whose sweet-voiced verse-narrations richly charmed the ear,
as she the eye.
She showed uncommon pluck in her persistent try
To keep her virtue; but the stauncher she, the viler
they became,
2895 Until their crafts prevailed and wore her into shame.
Espousing silk next bound her to one Thuc by name, whose
wife *majeur*
The hand of tyrant truculence raised over her
And haled her to Vô-Tich, resolved to pluck her perfect
petals off!
Then, though got free from what had seemed misfortune's
trough,
2900 She next encountered counterfeits and faithless proffers from
the Bac—
Folk mired in fetid depths unknown to rat or duck!
And so she drifted, leaf and cloud: was there no luck nor land
untried!
At last she met a man indeed, became the bride
Of one quick, brave beyond life's mark, of lucent pride and
rage, who sent

- 2905 A hundred thousand vengeful adjutants to vent
Chastisements here, possess this town, leave in lament
the citadel,
Because lulled times had lately loosed his queen to tell
Of dole borne here. A holocaust on vile folk fell and good
was paid
By Kieu's rescripts—and so correctly were they made
- 2910 That multitudes and nations-new shall muse their lade
for long anon.
But of her paladin, one bides here versed thereon:
That font is Thuc, a humble schoolman now. Your Honour
should inquire.'
Kim lets the old scribe bow and creakily retire,
Seeks Thuc's low billet out and sends his card, desiring him
to come.
- 2915 He asks him much concerning Kieu; and then would plumb
This man of hers: how stand his fortunes now? A summary
will serve ...
Thus Thuc: 'I feared his sword, yet felt the hand deserve
The frequent reverence on soldiers' lips, the verve of
their attest
And humble awe. Tu-Hai he was, in battle best
- 2920 A hundred times, triumphant, ever unsuppressed
though hosts did vie.
They met each other in the prefecture of Thai:
And well did beauty mate with might ... would gods deny
a match so meet?
Then ruled he peerless for some years, struck laws discrete
To those confines, and none remained who dared compete
with sword and pike.
- 2925 His eastern garrisons set roots that seemed to strike ...
But, lately, worlds of love and strife to me alike have spoken
less ...'

From tips and twigs of news in ever-denser press
The story grows; more pessimism dispossesses Kim's belief
In Kieu redeemed ... Ah, Kieu! lost creature, helpless leaf
2930 In undesisting storms; so tender, trembling, brief, thine
 arboured link—
Sure, long since blown art thou across the death-stream's
 brink ...
 And yet the calm of closure Kim lacks still, to sink in,
 smother pain,
Annul this livelong care, last loyalty restrain:
For here the sacred sandalwood, the lute, remain and memoir
 keep,
2935 Albeit once deft as were those strings today they sleep.
And might he still in savoursome sweet incense steep? Can
 harmonies
Content while thought engulfs her ceaselessly in seas?
Can wine? ... can summoned-by-the-cymbal pleasantries? ...
 the brimmed food-bowl?
 But what if he threw off this high-credentialed role?
2940 If he were too to wade storm-swollen streams, scale foliage-
 hidden heights,
Swoop down with shield and spear amid horrific fights,
To glimpse—perhaps between the wink of life's last lights
 and death—her face?
Yet where within the pallid air, the dark sea-race,
Remain the vortices of bird-wings flown, the trace of fishes'
 sweep?

2945 He sought more news, put off the contemplated leap,
And in that wise, unnoticed, seasons turned like creeping
 tides—until
One day, adorned by rainbow hues, a royal bill
Arrived whereon with dour aplomb the regal will expressed
 the need

For Kim to straight decamp and to Nam-Binh proceed,
2950 While colleague Quan to Phu-Duong town must post with
 speed of prompting spur!
The two prepared their courts and kin with hasty stir,
And on one road the convoy bent. While yet transferring
 to those posts,
They learned the rebel bane was rid by Bac-Kinh's hosts,
And even then the body-pyres reduced their boasts to smoke
 and dirt!
2955 The purpose eased, Kim pressed the Vuong to now divert
Their train and with him seek for Kieu, though malapert to
 duty's need ...
 And near the province seat, Hang-Châu, they did
 indeed
Find one a witness to her pass, by that last lead thus heard
 it told:
 'The armies stood that day and joined in mortal hold;
2960 There Tu, fordone by cunning, died where men dog-bold
 meleed most dense.
As for his dame, her brilliance saw ill recompense,
For at the prince's bid she passed to some insensate tribal
 chief.
Flung then was jade to glut the waves: for she would lief
Let Tien-Duong's depths be reliquary for her briefly-
 flourished grace.'
2965 There rent Kim's last, faint dream of ultimate
 embrace!
Kieu dead ... and he to thrive ... life's favours hence to face
 with spirit maimed.

XXVII

On Tien-Duong's rim they raised an altar plinth and framed
Thereon a tablet, that her bitter soul might tamed be,
 find repose
Where waves in endless silver ridges journeyed close,
2970 And passing eyes might see in white-winged dippings those
 of plunging geese
(Who seek at death, as stories tell, engulfing seas),
Or muse on tireless love, as once dammed deeps by lees of
 bird-borne jots ...

A sudden re-array of providential lots—
And fate directs nun Credence there, spry from her cot's
 adjacence sends ...
2975 She notes the votive tombstone raised to Kieu's deemed
 ends,
And needs must ask, amazed: 'What company, dear friends,
 assembles here?—
Mayhap the kin of her ye rashly so embier?
But she, for whom with requiem-rite ye stoop now tearfully,
 ne'er died!
They hear her words and gather wonder-stupefied
2980 Around her. Then irrupt doubts, questions, shrilly-cried
 ebulliency:

'Here be Kieu's spouse-intended, yon her mother be,
 Her father here, her sister this, her brother he, wed with,
 yon, her ...
 Full long-a-day our pangs for Kieu's cruel death concur,
 And now you, Abbess, speak to us this thaumaturgic
 wonderment?'

2985 Narrates the nun: 'By nearing ways we two long went,
 Your Kieu and I, until 'twas ripe in fate's intent that from
 this tide—
 'Neath which she would have loosed her substance,
 due-denied
 And woe-worn—I should raise her, then receive to
 bide in peace with me.
 We tend together Buddha's hallowed *bodhi* tree,
 2990 Which blooms beside the door of our straw snuggerly, nigh
 here. Now, soothed
 By pensive silver days, her fevered spirits smoothed,
 She rests; though sometimes still bends homeward thoughts;
 sharp-toothed their pain admits.'

Glee glows on faces, bright on brows coronal sits!
 Was ever such elation heard before, or its display so seen?
 2995 From when the leaf had flown its parent-coppice green,
 How oft scanned skies and streams, found void, to loss had
 been a testament?
 The fallen rose had perished, passed, its perfume spent,
 To please perhaps in some new world when they there went
 in due, not here:
 That dark divide betwixt, they thought, they first must clear!
 3000 Yet, fresh from Nine Springs shows she, won from death's
 dust drear to lucent sun!—
 As one they bow in gratitude before the nun.
 On foot they follow Credence, dog in file-of-one her
 old quick heels,
 A jostling throng that threads through reeds, round tussocks
 reels,

The rear the forward urging on, while still each feels
half-doubting yet ...

3005 They trace the winding band of river-bank, beset
By ever-fronting ferns ... then parts the verdant net,
a clearing breaks,
The nun's soft call the veil of silence lightly shakes
And summons—light! A golden dawn the ambient wakes;
a lotus shows ...

Kieu views that dear array, and procreant wonder grows—
3010 For soundless there the cedar stands, the lily glows, her crib
and cloak

Of yore; her sibs there, fledged fore-captains of their folk;
And there, beyond all, lordly Kim, to her bespoken in girl-
days!

But are they fancy's forms, those figures of amaze,
And do these orbs delight in void phantasmal haze, or dote
on dreams?

3015 Ah, no!—and happy apprehension spills bright streams ...
Though instant thoughts on things no miracle redeems too
blend that brine.

She stoops beside her mother's knees in deep incline,
And sums the sequel of that day they met to pine Ma's talon
hand:

'Since this your child was ta'en to wander from her land,
3020 The vagaries of gods and men did she withstand full fifteen
years,

Till river-bottom sands she sought to still her fears:
For she hath learnt, life lapped by love and void of tears
cannot be hers.'

The pair raise Kieu to them with tender hands,
while stirs

In ancient breasts the rue of loss. Yes, that recurs; yet she
is fair,

3025 As are the moon and roses still though time they bear;

A spring but one-third coursed, she shall engarland their
 thanksgiving hearts
And solace and re-sap their inmost sentient parts ...

What tales of rifts, reunions, hopes and hopeless starts each
 render each;

The old, the young, fire, foster, fan each other's speech ...

3030 And near stands Kim, whose gazings-on soon quite reteach
 him smiles of youth.

 They make kowtow before the Buddha's temple-
 booth,

And render thanks for one revived, restored through ruthless
 heaven's grace.

Old Vuong next summons bloom-wreathed cars to quit that
 place,

Among them counting Kieu—but on the latter's face now
 grows dismay,

3035 And she demurs: 'A fallen flower blown astray,
Resigned to toss on bitter swells, to expiating destiny
By drifting, sinking soon, in some deserted sea,
I thought such bliss as this today ne'er mine might be
 in life again:

 To be returned and this blest union new obtain.

3040 And so to still my long-disconsolate and pain-tried soul
 I chose

Retreat in this secluded cloister of repose,
To dedicate my later age to seeking close accord with plants,
To contemplation, fasts, and fare that nature grants;
And therefore drab, brown weeds, and not youth's scarlet
 pants, I found to suit

3045 My dimmed soul-fire—that yet may light the Absolute!
So, now, eschewing further strife in far and frantic world-dust
 spheres,

A vitiated thing as I, sin-stained these years,

Should keep her last-sworn vow, amend her past arrears and
new sins fend.
Beyond, too, lies a livelong debit to a friend:
3050 Can I desert her who restored me?—lightly tender her
adieu?
The old man smiles: 'Child, life is change we've
learnt, e'er-new;
And nun's own lore of yield and temperance holds due thou
shouldst submit
In this: that penance, sins, the soul and such, need fit
With nature's human ties. Wouldst thou against us pit,
who loving call?
3055 The gods returned thee live: the gratitude of all
Will Credence hymn, for she shall have a temple tall and
robes of gold!
To these pronouncements Kieu accedes with humble fold.
The nun is left alone to tend her river-wold. With
Kieu's augment
The Vuong attain the yamen of their late intent,
3060 And there they make to unity a long-prevented great repast!

~

Sate, tipsy from chrysanthemum liqueur, at last
Wife Vân the long-pent scruples in her breast would cast
upon their heed.
Thus she: 'The union Kim with Kieu was god-decreed—
They swore soul-friendship, reconfirmed by bridal deed,
though unapplied;
3065 Then broke across our placid plains that mighty tide,
Which left me, sister, proxy wife, from her divided by
the flood.
Yes, I was pulled—as amber draws a mustard stud
And lodestone pins—to Kim. I share Kieu's sentient blood!
... Yet, therefore too,

I felt her pain and longed for her with sister rue
3070 For fifteen years. Could any know that ambiguity's dismay?
But now the broken mirror stands restored today,
The antic Potter turns from jests and pugs his clay in truer
mould,
And love yet lives within these hearts we here behold!
The haloed moon shines silver still, as when were told their
vows of yore,
3075 The apricot late-picked hath gifts of sweeter store,
The plum more hues—then let their wedding pledged before
at last be hailed!
But soft-voiced Kieu would have it that her plea
prevailed:
'What boots it to revive an enterprise that failed so long ago?
There was a time when from those vows fair dreams did flow,
3080 But when I mind how like a beggar lately low I crept through
storms,
This tale of better days but worse that fall informs.
Shall brine yield back the rill's sweet flow? ... our lesser
norms refute the sea's?'
Now Kim joins too: 'Kieu, wouldst thou use aberrant
pleas
To bate one jot those everliving certainties, the vows we
swore?
3085 Did not a parchment cite the sanctions that those bore,
Affirmed their timelessness to nether earth? ... before
celestial highs?
Till all base matter melts and stars depart the skies,
The rule of probity all nature underlies: breach chaos serves!
And seems it not that thy return our pact preserves,
3090 New-validates it by high will? God guides: who swerves
doth disobey!
Yet Kieu: 'Our pact ... Aye, to be crowned come
wedding-day—

Would I had seen that chaste perfecting, as do they whom
 gods endow;
But all know well, bethinking of the nuptial Tao,
A bride must bear the odour of a budding bough, reflect
 the moon,
3095 Present her purity intact, not as a boon
 Twice-made. The bedroom brand, alas, and dawn, would
 soon that absence show:
For since this trifle fell upon her path of throe,
Bees forced and butterflies fulfilled on her their protean
 desires.
Those were times blustered, scudded with repeated gyres,
3100 When hid her gaze the moon, rent petals fell on mires of
 dark decay;
And now these flushed cheeks shame, not shy heart-quake,
 convey,
And artifice alone yet serveth to purvey seemed-virtue's state.
Dared I still hope, would not those memories berate
Me, world-befouled, envisioning to don chaste matedom's
 hemp and thorn?
3105 I know my lord long years a yearning heart hath borne,
 But would your honour better bear what lamp and morn
 showed men had done?
I mean the world outside my door to henceforth shun,
And though unworthy to be known a nun to nunhood's ways
 would cleave.
And if you grieve for ancient cheer, no more do grieve,
3110 But let our minds still intertwine in chess, and leave alone
 the lute;
Declare we cease to silken talk, to lovers' suit,
And sentiments that roil the soul and prosecute to luckless
 deeds!
Still answers Kim: 'This self-reproof that bows to
 creeds

Of moral height must grant thy past good service needs
 be reckoned too.

3115 For ages, think, within the wide-assented view,
Morality hath been a word that we construe in many ways:
 A rule in lazy times, a light in those of frays,
 When virtue needs transcend the things of common praise
 for pity's sake.

Then, everlasting filial dues can overtake

3120 Contingent maidenhood's, and whose demur should
 make of that a fall?

Cease—heaven still confers on us sweet days withal:
 The frost hath gone before the gate, the sky's drawn
 pall presages blue,

And roses rise from ashes, fresher than we knew;
 And though our moon then failed, mid-month ere this
 it grew to full again!

3125 Kieu, spurn those doubts, nor turn from me, or I shall fain
 Despair to see how love, twice-won, will with this wane
 to naught have passed.'

Kieu's parents follow those locutions to the last,
 And supplement in turn their own dispraising cast on her
 dissent:

Which would now mark with disrespect more argument.

3130 Kieu bows and, yielding, keeps enclosed her discontent
 within a sigh ...

Now wassails, salutations round their union fly,
 And flambeau-lit silk epigraphs, suspended high, bright
 blessings send.

Before fond ilk the pair in common homage bend;
 Gifts amply pass; augment the prayerful rites ... then end:
 the pair are wed!

3135 Alone, wine cups of turtleshell beside the bed
 Allay their trembling. Sweet and melancholy, redolent
 of dew,

Of lotus scent and carmine peaches, youth anew
Returns to face this moment tardy-come: youth rueful,
 vernal-prime,

Untaught from fifteen years denied of wedded time.

3140 And calms their awkward joy a lunar rise sublime, whose
 glimmers soon

Seek out beneath the nuptial curtain's silk festoon
Kieu's cheek, of such fresh hue as ever did a moon
 illuminate ...

And now, when mate might join at last with riven mate,
The bloom the bee of years gone by, whose days outwaited
 sun and tide—

3145 Kieu parts and cries: 'O fate, I must thy writ abide!
Defiled, an outcast, scorned—which ne'er can be denied by
 husband's say—

I, now, to soothe hurt love, submitted to your sway,
And hence will do wife-duties by quotidian day in seeming
 peace—

But soul-deep shame will not dislodge! ... I beg release

3150 From acts of attestation to the world's unceasing nightly
 trade!

Might our endearments, husband, not be higher made?—
To render love more holy, honoured and long-stayed?
 For would content

You to repeat the vulgar globe's accustomed bent:
Retrieve for further use the scrag of incense spent, or preen
 your cloak

3155 With cast-by blooms—the quips that ribald tongues invoke?
Distaste for others' glut would rouse chagrin; it, woken, love
 would slay! ...

And if you, loving, with wed-warrant took away
This hope of penance, would you then not love betray,
 its foe then be?

- Or you perpend the temple-dues of progeny?
3160 Good: sister Vân hath rendered motherhood for me;
I'm needless there.
A former sense of sinlessness still lingers spare,
But that endangered jot forewarns I should beware:
with it go I!
And sure the fields brim o'er with buds of fresher dye,
If that were all 'twas requisite to gratify my lord in fact?'
3165 Kim thus: 'Dear heart, the vows we swore exceed
love's act.
When fish or fowl that float or fly away find lacked from
their domain
The mate their roving left, what pitch of grief attain
Those riven ones! No less or lighter was the pain I carried
sore
So long for you, who loss, distress and searching bore
3170 Until this season when we met to new-restore our amity
While green still hang the tresses on the willow tree!
But dull is all solicitude to this gem free of earthly dust:
Our spotless love, the mirror of a perfect trust!
I bow before your words, before their thousand lustres
multiplied.
3175 Yet I, too, groping for lost jade beneath the tide,
Or when I raised love's obelisk and time defied, sought more
than sport,
And now that life again vouchsafes us to consort,
Let lute and lyre in other ambients make their court than
our chaste couch!
Kieu bows: her figure, face and mien combined
avouch
3180 Disburdenment, relief; and deep-drawn words debouch
her gratitude:
'For proof that honour lives—alas, so late renewed
In this benighted life—my thanks to one long viewed
a gentle man,

Who speaks such thoughts as only spirit-kindred can.
When plea and clement heed across two souls so span,
that meeting thrills!

3185 Now have I found protection from a hundred ills;
Now, surely too, a century of good distils from this charmed
night.'

They clasp, and lustres of pure joy their faces light
With more than former flushing fulgour, but unblighted by
rude throes.

The candelabras blaze, new-added incense glows,
3190 And ruby wine divides the night with offered flows to future
days.

But yet the still-persisting cast of erst-nights plays
On thought, and tempts Kim's sighs for those old ballad lays
which roused his past ...

Kieu, loath, thus yields to him: 'By these silk cords bound
fast

Was I once pulled to such confounds, and therein cast,
as but now bate.

3195 I plucked uncaring then, repenting overlate:
I play not for my heart's lord now but for that mate
of younger times.'

Then fingers rippled lightly: tranquil round the rhymes
Seemed music turned to waves, to motions like the mimes
of smoking scent ...

Whence came those floating tones, for summer noontimes
meant,

3200 Those butterflies of sound bard Trang once somnolent
descried in muse?

Whence these, for evenfall and April-apter use,
So like the call of wanton wraiths whose cuckoo-ruses nest-
folk fool?

- Notes shimmered, visions-fraught: pearls dropping in a pool
By moonlight; glimpsed jade-flanked Lam-Dien, its reticule
of mist sun-drawn ...
- 3205 The pentatonic fret so netted fancy's spawn,
The singing so engendered quickenings and dawns
of delight,
That Kim needs cry: 'Are those the songs which once
our night
So solemn made? But now methinks such sounds incite
to moods less grey;
Do they the contrasts of a restless soul portray,
3210 Or witness that perduring gladness sets its stay in sorrow's
place?'
Thus Kieu: 'To all excess, this was the parting trace:
To pretty rhyming, melting strains, that drew disgrace and
tears so long,
Tonight we who can undebauched be charmed by song
Declare farewell, and bid these cords of parlous congruence
untie.'
- 3215 To more such stern intents the woken cocks bring cry
Of choired alarms, warning that the eastern sky enkindles
day ...
Both houses Kim informs in full, that they might
weigh
The purport of that night-got pact; and all display high awe,
and praise
This gentlewoman whose resolved and inward ways
3220 Might teach those who life's sweets above its substance raise,
and toys extol.

XXVIII

They lived in perfect amity, such as no loll
In perfumed folds need brace, but by deep-laboured
 scholarship instead,
And wine bowls shared, and keen-fought chess. They
 watched spring spread
With blooms, oft sat to see from out its ebon bed the moon
 recruit;
3225 And so, ten vows, three incarnations shared, the fruit
 Of spousedom bore—but bodied in a restituted sweethearts'
 state.
 They built a joss-pagoda, noble and ornate,
And throngs fared forth to fetch the nun, for whom great
 feting was in store;
But coming at her strand they found a twig-barred door,
3230 Moss frothing on the courtyard-tiles and grasses soaring to
 the eaves.
The Reverend had gone, some said, for balsam leaves ...
So clouds pass; so the temporary crane bereaves the
 silent bay ...
In memory, Kieu thence untiring care would pay
To yon small sanctum's sandalwood and oil, that they should
 daily burn.
3235 Her home was blest with wealth and cheer in double
 turn:

Before Kim, splendent mandarinal pomps and learned
titles lay;
And Vân, the warding willow of his heir-array,
Gave forth her shelter to sophóra, laurel-bay, so bred
and famed
As few have matched their final flourishing, or claimed
3240 A garden garlanding a house that better framed fate's mend
to man ...

~

Consider now, all things fulfil high heaven's plan,
Which sets humanity to thrive as best it can, yet
foreordained.
Some, doomed in dust to live, when dead as much
have gained,
And others gather dignities—those too attained by
nod divine.
3245 To both at birth the gods sufficient lots assign
In point of wit and skill and luck—but that alignment vain
man shakes!
Beware, ye masters of life's aids: conceit soon wakes
A fate that tells: Yond *master* with *disaster* makes a
rhyming pair! ...
And then we carry debts from full a dark affair
3250 That stains duration's scroll, which we must bate or bear and
not blame gods.
But worthy hearts shall square at last the karmic odds,
And sooner quit shall be the one who humbly plods
than flies, proud-skilled.
May these few rustic, careless-compassed thoughts
have filled
With solace those dull times when sentry-drums are stilled
and darkness weighs ...

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