



Last Night I Dreamed of Peace

The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram

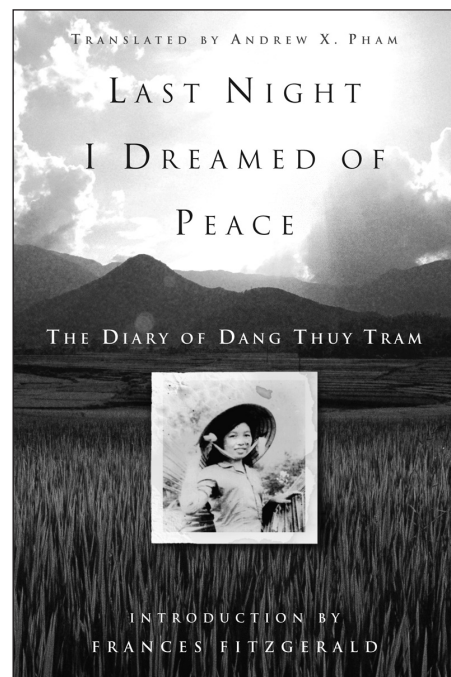
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READING LEVEL: 9th Grade



“Last night, I dreamed that Peace was established....For Peace and Independence, we have sacrificed everything. So many people have volunteered to sacrifice their lives for those two words: Independence and Liberty. I too—I have sacrificed my life for that grandiose fulfillment.”

—Dang Thuy Tram, June 4, 1968

• note to teachers •

This book is unique among the thousands of personal accounts by US veterans of what Americans call the Vietnam War, the dozens of accounts written by former members of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN), and the handful of accounts available in English from what we once called North Vietnam (DRV). In contrast to most US and ARVN accounts, it offers a voice from “the other side”—yet a voice so universal that ARVN and US soldiers both felt it should be preserved. In contrast to most northern accounts, it gives voice to the immediate, day-to-day experiences of war, chronicled by a young woman working as a civilian doctor on the front lines.

The best-known accounts we have to date were written retrospectively, with post-war hindsight, using the tools of fiction and history to explore suffering, physical and psychic wounds, and disillusionment. Such works include: Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, for example, or Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, Bao Ninh's *Sorrow of War*, Duong Thu Huong's *Novel Without a Name*, Nguyen Qui Duc's *Where the Ashes Are* or Quang X. Pham's *A Sense of Duty*. These works were written to be read by others.

Dang Thuy Tram was writing for herself, and from the midst of war. Hers is a voice of youth, optimism and idealism recorded in diary entries that were never intended to be read by Americans. Students will be fascinated by these diaries on many levels: as an introduction to the day-to-day experiences of war written by a civilian young woman whom students can imagine as a peer; as an insight into the motivations of someone who looked at joining the communist party of Vietnam as an honor to be won; as an inspiration for reflecting on how to live.

At the start of *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*, the war is present mainly in the wounds of the soldiers Dr. Tram cares for, and in her patriotic sentiments. As the diary progresses, war takes a larger and larger place as sorrow and matters of survival dampen but do not extinguish thoughts of love, affection, and a desire to lead an exemplary life. Note: It is helpful to encourage students to reflect on the differences between a diary and a work of fiction in order to prepare them for more repetition than a novel and less plot, less resolution.

• about the author

The moving story of the life, work, and death of DANG THUY TRAM is well told in the introduction to *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*, as is the remarkable story of the diaries themselves: their rescue from destruction, their preservation, their return after 35 years to Dang Thuy Tram's family, and the intense public interest they aroused in Vietnam.

Here I will add only a post-script on Thuy Tram's death, gleaned from the introduction to the Vietnamese publication of the diaries. People of the region buried her where she fell, and lit incense in memory and respect. After the end of the war, her remains were taken to the martyrs' cemetery in nearby Pho Cuong. In 1990 her family brought her remains back to the martyrs' cemetery in Xuan Phuong village of Tu Liem district near Hanoi.

A clinic honoring Dr. Tram was opened in Pho Cuong in December of 2006, supported by local and foreign individuals and organizations.

• historical background

The introduction to *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* traces the historical, military, and geographic settings for the diaries. Here I will sketch some of the elements of the view of history that was likely to have motivated Dang Thuy Tram, basing my reconstruction on her writing and on conversations with her contemporaries from Hanoi. It is a view that may challenge, or perhaps reaffirm, the views of readers who think of the Vietnamese/American war in Cold War terms. At the end of this section you'll find a short bibliography for further reading in history. A selection of other memoirs may be found at the end of this study guide, under "Other Titles of Interest".

Despite the fact that the first death recorded on the wall at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C is dated 1959, Americans often think of the Vietnam War as having started in the mid-1960's, perhaps with the Tonkin Gulf incident in 1964, or the major deployment of US ground troops in 1965. From Dang Thuy Tram's point of view, the war began two decades earlier. On the diary entry dated May 5, 1970, for instance, she talks about twenty-five years of fighting, and refers to the sixteen years that have passed since the Vietnamese victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu.

The "twenty-five years of fighting" reference denotes what Thuy Tram would have understood as the fight for Vietnamese independence, waged first against French colonial power, then against a mix of French and Americans (at the end of the French war, the US was paying 78% of the costs), and finally against the Americans. The young doctor would have known that in the power vacuum that followed the Japanese surrender in 1945, resistance leaders in many places in Vietnam seized control of government offices from the Japanese authorities in what is still celebrated each August 19th as the August Revolution. She would have also known that on September 2nd, Ho Chi Minh addressed a crowd of roughly 400,000 in Hanoi, declaring Vietnamese independence from the French, beginning with words borrowed from the US Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

So, it is likely that 1945 is the date Thuy Tram had in mind when she writes of twenty-five years of fighting. 1945 was an important turning point for other reasons as well. Northerners alive at that time who were born just two or three years before Dr. Tram vividly remember the winter of 1944-45 as the year of the famine, when people from the countryside poured into the cities and towns, searching for food. The weather had been calamitous for farming; the Vichy French, who were in administrative control of the colony, were hoarding rice; their Japanese allies, who were in military control, gave orders to burn the rice in the fields in order to plant jute; and the American bombing of ships and trains, intended to interdict Japanese military operations, made it impossible to ship rice from the south, where it was rumored that rice was so abundant that it was being used for fuel. Roughly one to two million people died.

There are older Vietnamese in America and Vietnam today who cannot forget that, as high school students in Hanoi during that time, they were required each morning before school to load trucks with the bodies of those who had died on the streets during the night so they could be taken for burial in a common grave. For many in the north the famine was a searing experience that galvanized and intensified armed resistance to the foreign presence.

It should be noted that even prior to the events mentioned above, Vietnam had a long history of struggling for its independence. When the first French troops attacked the south of Vietnam in the mid-1800s they complained, “Every peasant tying a rice stack is a center of resistance.” Yet even before the French, as Dang Thuy Tram would likely have learned in school, the Viets had been resisting Chinese domination from the north for two millennia, gaining their independence—an independence they repeatedly had to defend—in 939. Almost surely she would have learned this poem from Nguyen Trai, a 15th century poet and military strategist named by UNESCO as one of two world historic figures from Vietnam (the other being Ho Chi Minh):

Our country Dai Viet has long since been a land of old culture
With its own rivers and mountains, ways and customs
Different from those of the North (i.e., China).
The Trieu, Dinh, Ly, and Tran built our country (Vietnamese dynasties)
And stood as equals to the Han, Tang, Sung, and Yuan. (Chinese dynasties)
We have known both days of greatness and times of decline
But never have we lacked heroes.

The heroes she would have learned of in school included not only men but also the Trung sisters who chased out the Chinese in 43 AD and ruled for three years, and Lady Trieu who routed the Chinese army in 248. (All three are depicted leading the charge to battle seated astride elephants.) She would have learned of Ngo Quyen and the Battle of the Bach Dang River as the end of roughly a thousand years of Chinese colonization; she would have learned of the feudal dynasties that spanned the 11th through the 19th centuries—the Ly, Tran, Le, and Nguyen—and of such early heroes against the French as Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh.

In school she would also have learned of the 1954 victory against the French at Dien Bien Phu, the result of months of battle in a rugged mountainous border region that ended French colonization in Vietnam and inspired resistance throughout the French empire. But she may also have had more direct experience of this moment as well: by then she was 11 years old, and was likely to have witnessed for herself the parades and waves of joy and relief that swept through Hanoi in celebration of war ended and independence regained.

As a high school and college student Dang Thuy Tram would likely have been aware of many of the other events of the turbulent 1950s and early 1960s as well: rural land reform, urban redistribution of assets and elite privileges; Chinese influence as seen culturally in hair styles, clothing, movies and music; times of food shortages and rationing; the division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel and the expectation of reunification; the influx of refugees from the south and exodus of refugees from the north; the attacks against religious groups and communists in the south; the assassinations of Ngo Dinh Diem and John Kennedy; the beginnings of mobilization for war and of northern troops going south. In the two years before she volunteered to go south she would have experienced American bombing of the north and learned of American ground troops in the south.

In addition to the events she would have experienced and those she would have learned about in school, Dang Thuy Tram would have likely also been buoyed by a Marxist attitude towards history, which would have told her she was on the right side of History with a capital H, a force that advanced according to laws that favored the rise of the common people and the overthrow of privilege, exploitation, and imperialism.

• readings in history and anthropology

There are thousands of books on the history of the 20th Century wars in Vietnam, and a few on earlier periods as well. The following short list may serve as a starting place. For memoirs and oral histories, see “Other Titles of Interest” at the end of this guide.

- Duiker, William. 1995. *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam*. McGraw Hill. Includes six pages of suggested readings divided into “General”, “Documentary Sources”, “The Rise of Nationalism and Communism”, “The Franco-Vietminh Conflict”, “The Republic of Vietnam”, “The Vietnam War, 1964-1975”, “The War in the North”, and “The Postwar Era”.
- Herring, George. 1996. *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. McGraw Hill.
- Hy Van Luong. 1992. *Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformations in North Vietnam, 1925-1988*. University of Hawaii Press. An anthropological study.
- Jamieson, Neil. 1993. *Understanding Vietnam*. University of California Press. Largely based on the writer’s extensive experience and readings of Vietnamese literature.
- Marr, David. 1971. *Vietnamese Anti-Colonialism, 1885-1925*. University of California Press.
- _____. 1981. *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945*. University of California Press.
- Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid. 2006. *Vietnam: Borderless Histories*. The University of Wisconsin Press. Collected essays on histories of Vietnam through the First world War, and reflections on the uses of history.
- Taylor, Keith. 1983. *The Birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press. The history of Vietnam from its mythic origins in the marriage of the Dragon and the Fairy through independence from the Chinese empire in the 10th century.
- _____ and John K. Whitmore. 1995. *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*. Cornell University. A collection of essays on various points of Vietnamese history, from mythic times to the early 20th Century.

• reading the diaries

Classroom discussion of Vietnam often revolves around a discussion of the war framed in political and military terms. One question that often arises out of such an approach is “How did the North Vietnamese and their southern allies persist in the face of such overwhelming force?” How did they withstand the 15 to 29 million bombs that fell on a land a bit smaller than California? Bombs, napalm, giant bulldozers, and chemicals that destroyed 50% of the forests in some provinces, not to mention hand-to-hand combat and the destruction of thousands of villages and towns. The materiel advantages were heavily on the side of the Americans and their Saigon allies.

Last Night I Dreamed of Peace offers a window into the spirit that fueled that steadfast resistance. It also offers a sense of shared humanity, a humanity that longs for an end to the losses and pain of war. The book makes a useful companion to historical accounts of the war in Vietnam, and joins a few classic works that have been produced in the midst of war, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

It may be useful to think of the book both as poetry with lines to be savored and pondered and as a document to be analyzed and understood.

Approaching *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*

1. What political and cultural distances do you expect to have to cross in order to understand Dang Thuy Tram's diaries? Before you begin reading, write a page or two of reflection on these, or make an annotated list that you can refer back to when you have finished the book. In what ways were your predictions accurate or inaccurate? What else did you discover about politics and culture through your reading?
2. How is reading a diary different from reading a novel? How is it different from reading a formal history? What can be expected of a novel or a history text that can't be expected of a diary? What can be expected of a diary that a novel or history can't offer? What can be said about the truth claims of each of these genres? Predict some of the frustrations and some of the pleasures you may find in reading a diary compared to reading a novel or a history.

Exercises for seeing the world through the eyes of Dang Thuy Tram

1. Dang Thuy Tram uses familiar words in ways that are sometimes unfamiliar; the connotations of her words might strike you as unexpected or unusual. Choose one of the words below, or another that catches your attention, and keep a record of how she uses it throughout the book. A teacher might divide up the words among students, and then have them compare findings.
Sample words: right, righteousness, love, hatred, dream, noble, pure, independence, freedom, hero, joy, youth, revolution, communism
2. What are Dang Thuy Tram's experiences of America and Americans?
3. What are Dang Thuy Tram's experiences of Vietnam? Of the North? Of the South?
4. What experiences has Dang Thuy Tram had that you have not?
5. What experiences have you had that Dang Thuy Tram did not have?
6. What would you like to ask her if you could have a conversation with her? What do you imagine she might like to ask you?
7. Enumerate the losses she encountered during the course of this diary. Compare them to losses you have experienced.
8. Dang Thuy Tram writes about "nurturing her heart". What does she mean by this? How do you nurture yours?
9. What readings influence Dang Thuy Tram's view of the world, as reflected here? What readings, song lyrics, or movies influence your life?
10. Keep a diary for as much time as possible. One or two days are sufficient, but a week is even better. At the end of the time go back and analyze differences between your diary and Dang Thuy Tram's. Think both of the content and the tone of your writing.

• reading the diaries (continued)

The style and spirit of Thuy's writing

1. American veterans of the war in Vietnam have described Dang Thuy Tram's writing as literate, poetic, and mature. "How does this happen?" one veteran asks, continuing: "How would I have stacked up? How would people today stack up?" Do you agree with the veteran's assessment? How would you answer his questions?
2. On the other hand, some people have called Thuy's diaries almost unbelievably romantic. Remember that she was writing at a time different in many ways from the present moment. Idealism, hope, and longing for new, revolutionary social relations were evident in many places, from "The Summer of Love" in the United States, to Mai '68 in France, the Cultural Revolution in China, Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, and Liberation Theology in Latin America, to give but a few examples. In what ways do Thuy's writings reflect these broader themes? In what ways was her experience quite different?
3. A high school classmate of Thuy Tram's, writing in the introduction to the Vietnamese publication of the diaries by Nha Xuat Ban Hoi Nha Van, finds that her writing expresses the "very special spirit" of a particular moment of history, and of a particular group of students who grew up right after the end of the war against the French.

Educated by those who had won the victory at Dien Bien Phu, they were imbued with the spirit of "new life" that was nurtured during those "hard but heroic" days, he says. He compares their fervor to the sort of belief found only in religion, saying that going to war was not only a duty but a wish, the dream of their group of friends. Their only fear, as he recalls, was that if they didn't enlist to go south they would lose the chance to be present for the victory celebration. What evidence can you find to support or counter this interpretation of Thuy's spirit?

4. Rob Whitehurst, who worked on a translation of the diaries his brother saved from the fire, insists: "Thuy's spirit did not disappear on that mountain." Do a bit of research on Vietnamese beliefs regarding what happens to the spirits of the dead, and then reflect on the various meanings of the word "spirit". What part of a person's life do you believe ends with death, and what continues? How would you describe the spirit of Dang Thuy Tram's work and writing? In what ways might you say her spirit has persisted after her death, through her diaries and the Whitehurst brothers' work? Reflect on the possibilities and limits of writing as a means of transmitting the human spirit.

Questions of War and Peace

1. Why do people go to war? Why do they fight? Consider both patriotic and personal reasons. Do you know anyone who has fought in a war? What reasons did they have for going to war? What do they think about those reasons now? How was the war they fought in similar to and different from the war in which Dang Thuy Tram fought?
 2. What reasons did Dang Thuy Tram give for going to war?
 3. For what reasons was Dang Thuy Tram willing to sacrifice her life? What meanings does the word “sacrifice” have in the world you live in? Do you know people who are in some way sacrificing for a cause they believe in?
 4. “The whole forest has been ripped apart, trees down everywhere, houses leaning askew, walls and roofs nearly gone,” Thuy writes on page 202. While most of her diary is reflection, from time to time Thuy gives us glimpses of the physical context of war. Reconstruct a description of this context based on the diary.
 5. “You know, I joined the army to go kill communists,” Fred Whitehurst says in an interview with NPR, discussing the diaries he saved from the fire and then returned after 35 years. “I wasn’t against the war at all, and I think (I was) very effective as an American soldier. I didn’t damn my army or damn my nation. But I’ve always known since in Vietnam when I did it, when you put a bullet into a human being you cannot take back that thing called life. You cannot get it back, and Dang Thuy Tram describes so deeply what that thing is. . . . And a bullet went right through her forehead and in that instant, she was gone. Can we think of another way to do this?” Read the story of Fred Whitehurst and the diaries in the introduction to *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*, and watch the video of the conference presentation in which he makes them public: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/redirects/symposium2005.htm>.
- Write a reflection piece on a) the way these diaries have linked the lives of former enemies; b) the meanings of the diaries for Fred and Rob Whitehurst; or c) what might be “another way to do this”.
6. What resonances and differences do you find between Dang Thuy Tram’s diaries and other writings you know on the Vietnam war? On other wars? How do you account for the differences, and for the similarities?
 7. Comparison is frequently made between the war in Vietnam and the wars in Iraq. Can you find diaries or other writings from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Compare them to *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*.
 8. It took thirty-five years for these diaries to be returned to Dang Thuy Tram’s family. This delay may be understood in part by the explanation given in the introduction to the book. Yet it is not uncommon for the trauma of war to cause amnesia, disruptions, and silences that linger on for decades. The anthropologist Michael Jackson suggests storytelling as a way to unfreeze the present from where it is stuck in past trauma. Do you think these diaries might serve such a purpose? Why or why not?
 9. Americans sometimes talk about the war in Viet Nam as a war between North and South. How do Dang Thuy Tram’s diaries and the introduction to *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* make this division more complex? It may be helpful to recall that no one side (ARVN or NLF) ever controlled more than 60% of the south at any one time.

• reading the diaries (continued)

Values and relationships

1. An article published by a group that describes itself as “promoting sustainable environments for religious freedom worldwide” argues that “...few people realize that Communism’s success in Vietnam...depended on the deeply spiritual nature of the Vietnamese people. Tram’s diaries reveal the quasi-religious nature of her devotion to the people... not a bland regurgitation of Communist ideology, but an intensely human, and even quintessentially feminine account of life in the cruel realities of war [that reveals] a virtuous, intelligent, loving, and gentle woman—admirable in every way.” The article then gives the following examples of Vietnamese values: honor, sacrifice, self-denial, pursuit of justice, truth and exclusivity, utopian vision, love. Comment on the general argument made by this account. (Institute for Global Engagement: “Fire on the Page” by Rachael Boeve)
2. References to “revolutionary love” are sprinkled throughout the text. To give but one example: “Why can we, revolutionists, love each other so much? A love as deep and immense as the ocean, a love that surges like frothing waves, passionate, pure.” (p 65) What does Thuy mean by this?
3. Dang Thuy Tram has a number of “brothers” to whom she feels quite close—relationships Americans may find puzzling. First, it must be borne in mind that Dang Thuy Tram died without knowing “anything more intimate than kisses”, as the translator of the book puts it. Next, it is helpful to understand that the Vietnamese pronoun system may cause confusion in translation, since there are multiple ways of saying “I”, and multiple ways of saying “you”. People in frequent contact with each other in a group often speak to each other in pronouns that reflect family relationship and rank, eg: “big sister, little brother.”

Finally, the pressures of war create strong bonds based on common cause and fear of death—one’s own death and that of the friend. Comment on Thuy’s wartime relationships. You may find it helpful to trace some of these relationships individually through the pages of the book to see their development. What are the criteria Thuy uses to accept or reject the brother/sister relationship? What limits does she put on these relationships? What is their importance in the context of war?
4. Thuy’s writings are full of references to her values and ideals. Write a reflection paper on one, or a cluster, of passages that reveal ideals that you would like to consider more deeply.
5. Reflect on the praise and criticism of the Party bound together in Thuy’s love of the revolution, as expressed in the following quotes. What is the meaning of “communism” for Thuy?

“The revolution has forged a noble people and bound them into a unit firmer and more solid than anything in this life. Could anything make one prouder than to be part of this family of revolutionaries?” (p 61)

“There is no attempt to rid the Party of the pervasive pettiness and cowardice that are staining the honor of the title Party Member.” (p 27)
6. Thuy often gives advice to herself. One example: “Thuy, you must never let sentiment be separated from reason.” Another: “Life is so short, but each passing day must be a worthy day. Don’t let anyone tell the story of our lives with criticism.” (p 180) And yet another: “Try to love and care for one another when we are still alive, but when we are dead, crying is only tears on a lifeless mound of earth.” (p 204) Select an example or two for reflection, or look for the broad themes of her advice. Does the advice seem appropriate? Does Thuy seem to follow her own advice?

Poetry, language, and the text

1. Thuy frequently cites poems and bits of literature that she has memorized. Based on your reading of her diaries, explain the meaning one of the following texts (or another or your choosing) might have had to Thuy.

From the cover page of her diary:

“A person’s most valuable possession is life. We only live once; we must live so as not to sorely regret the months and years lived wastefully, not to be ashamed of the months and years lived wastefully, so that when we die we can say, ‘All my life and all my strength have been dedicated to the most noble goal in life, the struggle to liberate the human race.’”
Nikolai Ostrovsky (1904-1936)

To live is to face the storms and not to cover before them.

From the revolutionary poet To Huu:

“Is there anywhere on this earth
Like the South agonizingly faithful
Like the south deftly courageous” (p 31)

And again, To Huu:

“Who has ever won without ever having lost?

Who has ever grown wise without ever having been gullible a few times?” (p 147)

“Gold tested by fire, Will tested by danger.” (p 221)

2. Do you feel the title is appropriate? If not, what would you have chosen?
3. What changes can you find over time in Thuy’s writing style, attitudes, subject matter, and language?
4. What is the effect of the diaries on common stereotypes of Vietnam and the Vietnam war?

• translation: issues and exercises

Given that even a word as concrete as “house” is imagined quite differently by people living in different contexts, it is perhaps less surprising that there are misunderstandings than it is that despite it all, the human spirit can sometimes communicate creatively across difficult barriers. The author, the translator, and the target audiences for Dang Thuy Tram’s diaries, for instance, all have quite different experiences of the world and understandings of those experiences, based on such things as age, gender, occupations, education, politics, religious or philosophical approach to life, temperament, and social and geographic location, among other variables.

After reading the translator’s foreword to *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*, compare the following translations of two passages from Dang Thuy Tram’s diaries. These passages are neither representative nor unique, but rather raise questions of translation that could be asked of the entire text.

First passage: Read these passages closely. Summarize each briefly, noting any differences in meaning or feelings conveyed. Underline the words that contribute to these differences, then answer the questions below and add your own.

“I suddenly understand how people can sacrifice their entire lives to be true to the Revolution... because the Revolution trains them to become very high and beautiful and ties them together making them stronger than anything else in the world. What is more honorable than to live in the family of the revolution?” (Oct 22, 1968—Texas Tech)

• translation: issues and exercises (continued)

“I suddenly understand why people can sacrifice their entire lives for the revolution and are absolutely faithful to the revolution: Because the revolution forms impressive people and draws them into a unity that’s more sustainable and more closely bound than any other thing in this life. Can there be anything more honorable than living in the family of the revolution?” (Oct 22, 1968—anonymous translator)

“Now I can understand why people can sacrifice their whole lives for our cause, and how they can remain absolutely faithful to the revolution. The revolution has forged a noble people and bound them into a unit firmer and more solid than anything in this life. Could anything make one prouder than to be part of this family of revolutionaries?” (Oct 20, 1968—*Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*)

In the three preceding passages compare the flavors of the adjectives used for the kind of people forged by the revolution: “very high and beautiful,” “impressive,” or “noble”? Compare the action of the revolution on these people: does it “train,” “form,” or “forge” them as it “ties them together,” “draws them into a unity,” or binds them? Are they then “stronger than anything else in the world,” “more sustainable and closely bound,” or “firmer and more solid”? What are the differences among each of these triplets of phrases, and how do they shade the interpretation? What difference does it make to capitalize “revolution”?

Second passage: A close reading of the following short sentences should heighten your appreciation for the translator’s choices, the translator’s art.

“Oh! The Revolution is so wonderful in this land: the sorrow and the mourning are nowhere else the same, and the lively happiness of it cannot be compared to anywhere else.” (August 6, 1969—Texas Tech)

“Oh! The revolution on this small plot of earth is so unusual with its unequaled pain and the unequaled ebullience of its optimism.” (August 6, 1969—anonymous)

“Oh, how strange is the revolution in this land, with suffering and death unequaled anywhere, but with optimistic eagerness unequaled anywhere.” (August 6, 1969 *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*)

What difference does it make whether the Revolution is called “wonderful,” “unusual,” or “strange”? What is the difference in feeling between “this land” and “this small plot of earth”? Between “sorrow and mourning,” “pain,” and “suffering and death”? Between “lively happiness,” “ebullience of its optimism,” and “optimistic eagerness”?

Write a reflection essay on the ways translation may nuance the understanding of a piece, and on the difficulties of translating Dang Thuy Tram’s diary in particular.

• questions for further reading, research, and reflection

1. A reading of *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* brings to mind many questions of general Vietnamese history and culture for further research, including: the pronoun system; family relations and obligations; women in war; the mythic and real heroes that may have inspired Thuy Tram; colonial experiences with the Chinese and the French; the literary and wartime uses of diaries. Focus your research on one of these topics or some other aspect of Vietnamese culture inspired by the text.
2. Dang Thuy Tram quotes poems and lines from To Huu, Nguyen Du, and others. Research these writers individually, or sketch the history of Vietnamese poetry.

3. Research on several points in the specific history of the mid-20th Century wars in Vietnam would deepen an understanding of this text: the French and the Japanese roles in Vietnam during World War II; the beginning of American involvement in Vietnam during World War II; the August Revolution; Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence; the war against French re-colonization of Vietnam; the role of the Emperor Bao Dai; nationalism and communism; feudalism and revolution; the battle of Dien Bien Phu; Ngo Dinh Diem's domestic policies; Ngo Dinh Diem's relations with the US; the Viet Minh; the formation of the National Liberation Front; Buddhist actions; the Tonkin Gulf incident; the Tet Offensive; the My Lai massacre; and, after the close of Dang Thuy Tram's diary, the eventual ending of the war.
4. What can you find out about diaries kept by Americans during the war? Scan several, read one, and then write a comparison with the diary kept by Thuy Tram.
5. What can you learn about the kinds of documents that were kept during the war, and about what happened to these documents when they were captured? If you have access to the National Archives in Washington, DC, you will find a rich resource in its Captured Document Exploitation Center (CDEC). Can you find parallel information for Vietnam? What happened to documents in the North? In the South?
6. What international rules pertaining to hospitals and medical workers in war zones were in place at the time when Dr. Thuy was working? What can you find out about the way these rules were or were not respected by all sides during the war in Vietnam? Reflect on your findings.
7. What can you discover about the sort of education Thuy would have been likely to receive? Think of both structure (such things as ages and length of schooling, division of the year, classroom organization, holidays, physical plant) and content. Were French texts still in use in her early years? What were the important dates in Vietnamese history, going back to the time of the Dragon and the Fairy, the Hung Kings and the Bronze Drums?
8. In Vietnamese, terms of address are very rich and expressive in their ability to convey not only formal relationships like age and status, but also transitory feelings of intimacy, respect, and anger. Research the way terms of address have changed across time in Vietnam, reflecting changes in society.
9. In many wars there are stories of extraordinary human encounters between enemies. There is, for example, the story of the spontaneous Christmas truce between British and German soldiers fighting on WW II's western front in 1914. German carol singing was answered by British carols, followed by meetings in the no-man's-land between the trenches and an exchange of small gifts—chocolate, whisky, cigars, jam. The commanding officers were dismayed by this contact, and made sure it could not happen again. What other stories can you find of recognition of a shared humanity in the midst of war? Reflect on what makes these encounters possible and impossible, and on ways the story of the return of Dang Thuy Tram's diary to her family is similar to and different from these stories.
10. There have been other diaries returned to Vietnam by Americans. Find the stories of these encounters.
11. What can you find out about the sensation these diaries caused when they first appeared in Vietnam? Why do you think they caused such a stir?
12. The publication of *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* draws together people who once were on opposing sides of a war: northerners, southerners, US soldiers, peace activists, Vietnamese Americans. Research and reflect on what makes this collaboration possible.

• other titles of interest

Books

The Central Highlands: A North Vietnamese Journal of Life on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, 1965-1973, by Dr. Le Cao Dai. The Gioi Publishers: 1994. Medical journal of a doctor on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Even the Women Must Fight, by Karen Gottschang Turner with Phan Thanh Hao. Wiley: 1998. Oral histories of the wartime and postwar experiences of ordinary women and heroes from the regular army of North Vietnam, the militia and local forces, and the volunteer teams.

No Other Road to Take: Memoir of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Dinh, translated by Mai Elliott. Cornell: 1976. Nguyen Thi Dinh was Chairman of the South Vietnam Liberation Women's Association, and Deputy Commander of the National Liberation Front Armed Forces.

Novel without a Name, by Duong Thu Huong. William Morrow: 1995. A fictionalized account of the spiritual weariness of war, written in the voice of a male soldier by a woman who led a Communist Youth Brigade during the final bitter years of the war.

The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family, by Mai Elliott. Oxford: 1999. The entanglement of wars and family life across four generations and two continents.

Then the Americans Came: Voices from Vietnam, by Martha Hess. Four Walls Eight Windows: 1993. Interviews and portrait photos taken during a 1990-91 road trip from Saigon to Hanoi. A sampler of wartime experiences.

Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution, by Sandra C. Taylor. Univeristy of Kansas Press: 1999. Stories of women from the south.

When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace, by Le Ly Hayslip, with Jay Wurts. Plume (Penguin): 1989. Memoir of a young woman who grew up in a village near Da Nang, caught in the cross-fire of war.

Videos

The Sound of the Violin at My Lai, by Tran Van Thuy. 1998. A message of recovery and renewal from the site of one of the worst massacres of the American/Vietnamese war, which took place in Quang Ngai Province, the province where Thuy was a doctor. Sepia-toned images from the past yield to bright colored images from today: children playing; two American helicopter pilots reuniting with women they rescued from the slaughter; an American marine playing his violin in offering to the dead on all sides; the inauguration of a Vietnamese-American Peace Park. "Best Short" in Asian Pacific Film Festival in Thailand, 1998.

Hidden Warriors: Women on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, documentary produced by Karen Turner and Phan Thanh Hao, directed by Karen Turner. 2005. Companion to *Even the Women Must Fight* (see books). Available in DVD. 45 minutes. Includes a study guide. Contact Karen Turner at ktturner@holycross.edu.

• also of interest, available from Random House, Inc.

Another Vietnam by Tim Page

At Hell's Gate by Claude Anshin Thomas

Father, Soldier, Son by Nathaniel Tripp

Gone Native by Alan Cornett

Last Man Out by James E. Parker, Jr.

Letters from Vietnam by Bill Adler

Lost In Translation by Martin Dockery

My Detachment by Tracy Kidder

Rolling Thunder in a Gentle Land
by Andrew Wiest

Going After Cacciato by Tim O'Brien

Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien

Voices of War by The Library of Congress

War Torn by Ted Bartimus, et al

• internet resources

www.thuytram.com This Random House website gives background information on Dang Thuy Tram, her family, her work, and the book, along with photos and clips from an upcoming film (see “Finding Thuy”).

www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/redirects/symposium2005.htm March 19, 2005. The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University: 5th Triennial Symposium. “Session 10d: War Diaries”: a video of conference presentations by Fred and Rob Whitehurst during which they gave the diaries to the archives of Texas Tech. Included is footage of audience participant Ted Engelmann offering to look for the family on his upcoming trip to Vietnam. Of interest as well on the video is a presentation by Todd Pfannestiel, Associate Professor of History at Clarion College, reading excerpts from the captured war diary of an American soldier and from diaries of North Vietnamese soldiers. There is a parallel with Dang Thuy Tram’s diary, in that the American’s diary was kept by a museum in Hanoi.

Google search: “The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram” Noteworthy in the 500 entries are the transcript of a National Public Radio interview (2006) with Fred Whitehurst, the American soldier who kept the diaries, and a *Vietnam Investment Review* interview with Ted Engelmann, who helped Whitehurst return them to Thuy’s family. In addition, “Fire on the Page” compares communist and Christian values found in the book, and “A Daughter’s ‘Soul’ Preserved by the ‘Enemy’” (sic) contains more interviews with the Whitehursts and Dang Thuy Tram’s family. Those who read Vietnamese may be interested in the account of a young reporter’s travels from Vietnam to America to find Nguyen Trung Hieu, the South Vietnamese soldier who told Fred Whitehurst to save the diary from the fire.

www.findingthuy.com Website for a film that is being made about Thuy’s life, the diaries, and the story of their return to her family, including meetings in Vietnam and America between the Whitehursts and Thuy’s mother and sisters.

www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org Resources on American women during the war in Vietnam, including books, magazine articles, films, and bibliographies.

With thanks to members of the Vietnam Studies Group who shared opinions and made suggestions for this guide, as well as to colleagues in the history department of The College of the Holy Cross.

• about this guide’s writer

From 1991 to 2001, DIANE FOX lived and worked in Vietnam as a teacher, writer, and consultant. Since 1996 she has taught Vietnamese studies at Portland State University, Hamilton College, and the College of the Holy Cross. Her work in anthropology is based on conversations with families in Viet Nam thought to be affected by Agent Orange.

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