

TWO POEMS FROM THE VIETNAMESE

Translated by Graeme Wilson

Pho Hien

They say this town is livelier than the capital.

To me, it's dull: so dull, it hurts.
Three days' search and all I've seen
Are old Chinese and Chinese squirts
And long white miles of Chinese teeth
And Chinese whores in long black skirts.

From the anonymous satire *Dr. Quynh*
(18th century)

Karma

O what a dismal, dreadful fate:
Married to this old crock.

Your husband? Surely, that's your father?

One can hear the shock
In people's voices, and it pains me
That I can but say
No, my husband, ah, but only
In a special way:
A debt incurred in some past life
Which now I must repay.

Folk Song (16th century)