

# Le Ai Siem, a Famous Poet, Who Wrote About His Hometown and the Vietnamese People through Poetry

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

Le Ai Siem is a famous poet of Tien Giang province - Vietnam. He is a multi-talented artist, with a simple style of writing poetry, rich in sincere emotions, close to nature, to people in social relationships. His works have a lyrical folk melody, praising the beautiful homeland, praising people in the face of hardships and sympathizing with the fate of people when facing difficulties, knowing how to overcome challenges to come to life, life with faith and determination. The article also highlights the successes of the poet who has used many unique artistic methods to contribute to creating poetry that touches people's hearts and he also makes a positive contribution to Vietnamese literature in modern times.

**Keywords:** Le Ai Siem, Vietnamese Poet, Tien Giang Province, Lyrical Poetry, Folk Melody, Emotional Expression, Vietnamese Literature.

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## 1. INTRODUCE

Poet Le Ai Siem, whose real name is Le Ba Ai Siem, was born on December 18, 1953 in Trung Hai commune, Giao Linh district, Quang Tri province. In 1964, he went to the North and lived in Hai Phong. In 1965, he returned to Tay Hieu farm, Nghia Dan district, Nghe An province, which was also his father's workplace. In 1967, Le Ai Siem had his poems published in the literary magazine of Hung Nguyen district, Nghe An province. In January 1972, the author enlisted in the Vietnamese army. In March 1972, the poet entered the battlefield of Route 9 in Southern Laos. In 1976, Le Ai Siem passed the entrance exam to Ho Chi Minh City University, majoring in history. In 1977, he had his poems published in the Saigon Giai Phong newspaper with the article "Going to Ben Thanh market on Liberation Day". In 1980, Le Ai Siem graduated from university. In 1981, he worked at the Tien Giang Provincial Party History Research Board. During that time, he had poems and short stories published in Tien Giang Culture and Arts. From 1992 to present, Le Ai Siem has held the position of Director of Tien Giang Provincial Museum.

Awards in artistic activities: In 1982, he won the second prize (no first prize) for Tien Giang poetry organized by the Tien Giang Literature and Arts Association. In 1985, he won the second prize (no first prize) for Tien Giang poetry written on the theme of

"Armed Forces". In 2003, he won the first prize in the Mekong Delta poetry contest. In 2005, he won the C prize of the Vietnam Literature and Arts Union. In early 2010, Le Ai Siem won the fourth prize for poetry written on "Thousand Years of Thang Long". At the end of 2010, Le Ai Siem received two fourth prizes for poetry with the theme "writing about President Ho Chi Minh" organized by Ho Chi Minh City Television. In 2011, the author won the First Prize for Tien Giang Literature and Arts. Currently, poet Le Ai Siem is living in My Phong commune, My Tho city, Tien Giang province. Published poetry collections: Wildflower epic (poetry collection), Wild Rivers That Open the Land epic (poetry collection), Echo poetry collection (poetry collection). In addition to writing poetry, Le Ai Siem also writes short stories, articles, essays, historical compilations, etc.

## 2. AIM OF THE STUDY

Studying poet Le Ai Siem aims to understand the development of Tien Giang poetry as well as the process of writing poetry, literary awards, the poet's personality and character. On the other hand, surveying poet Le Ai Siem, we can see new and modern features in the author's poetry in general and Tien Giang - Vietnam poetry in particular, helping the writer gain experience in analyzing works, serving the work of teaching Literature in the secondary school program in Vietnam.

### 3. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The author uses the historical method: examining the poetry of Tien Giang - Vietnam from 2000 to 2025 from a specific historical perspective associated with the local historical context of Tien Giang province - Vietnam. Using the poetics approach: Applying the understanding of poetics to examine Le Ai Siem's poetry to find unique features in content and form of expression. In addition to the two methods mentioned above, the author uses methods such as: analysis, synthesis, comparison to highlight the characteristics of Le Ai Siem's poetry.

### 4. RESEARCH CONTENT

#### 4.1. The Theme of Writing about Homeland in Le Ai Siem's Poetry

Love for the homeland has penetrated deeply into the minds of poets. For Le Ai Siem, the poet always has sincere feelings for his homeland. The homeland in Le Ai Siem's mind is the place that has attached countless memories from childhood to adulthood. The homeland has settled in the poet's soul the memory of the countryside, although poor but imbued with affection, no matter where he goes and where he returns, the poet still longs for the homeland where he was born and raised on that land. With poetic words filled with love, Le Ai Siem has created for himself a unique appearance, a unique rhythm in the nostalgia, in the echoing memories of a countryside: Tomorrow I will go to Ben Tre / The old ferry station is filled with regret / Somewhere, lovers are waiting for the ferry to dock / Somewhere, carrying burdens / Somewhere, we meet, shaking hands and smiling (poem: Lullaby of a Tien River Wharf). Not stopping there, the poet has integrated into the country, integrated into his homeland in every corner of the street, every park. This is the poet's impression of My Tho: Sending half of my childhood back to my hometown/ Half of my tears stay in the streets/ There are eyes that know the green of the neighbor/ Touching my eyes.../ Does anyone miss anyone?/ Does anyone miss anyone?/ The lover's park where I miss you/ What does My Tho sing through the wind/ Vaguely the words of people loving each other" (The poem Spring Short Song).

A poor village, with two windy river banks, with wells, banyan trees, with childhood, grandparents, parents and many stories of the village, appearing in each step of Le Ai Siem's exile, has become the sadness of a land without people: Ben Hai River becomes a dividing knife/A The roofs of some houses in the North, some in the South/ I went to school, my mother took me to class/ At noon, I trotted home on the fine sand/ The smell of braised fish was fragrant and spicy at the beginning of the village/Hundreds of birds of all kinds sang in a row of bamboos" (Poem: Countryside). The author's childhood had unforgettable memories in the poor village with thatched roofs and houses, but the affection was truly precious. The poet recalled his innocent and joyful childhood: "Where I have a childhood sky/ Poor village with houses without numbers/ The day I first learned to read/ Who caused the rainy afternoons/ Under the thin thatched roof/ The two of us stood naked bathing/ Hugging each other and giggling" (Poem: Rainy Porch). Or Hanoi

now only has memories. Those are the poor, crooked streets with old roofs that are there when the drizzle comes. The association of Le Ai Siem is like falling into a dream, although the scene is sad, it has left the author with a deep feeling, the memory echoes back full of sobs: I am blurred in the winter drizzle/ To get lost in Phai street/ The roofs of houses have been patient for a hundred years/ Time passes crookedly like old crocodiles/ The small alley of the street rains through/ The afternoon falls a shade of sadness" (Poem: Hanoi winter drizzle).

The poet thought again about the Central region suffering with sand and wind, burning with feelings so that now in dreams he still remembers: He left the green Central region/ The Central sea carries the sand dunes tilting in the day/ The Central sea pushes the cliffs/ The sand itself makes beautiful breasts like you/ For the Central region to be young again" (Poem: Flower of the thorn). The image of the market street in the afternoon evoked in his memory. Those were the phoenix flowers, pink heels, the sound of old clogs somewhere that made the poet feel nostalgic: He returned to the market street/ The afternoon clouds spread over the tower/ The phoenix flowers fell for a long time/ They were the flower seasons of the past/ Pink heels, the sound of old clogs somewhere (Poem: Market Street). Beautiful images with very simple but meaningful poetic ideas. The author describes the majestic Dray Sap: The cloud slipped and fell on the waterfall/ The wind fiercely collapsed in the afternoon/ The bird flew in panic under the wounded horizon/ Oh Dray Sap!/ It seems like autumn is still here/ The way we go back to the wild sunflowers has not yet fallen buds/ Shadow Kônia afternoon, carrying a basket of longing, bending over/The horizon has holes in several patches of fields (Poem: Dray Sap)

The theme of homeland has contributed to enriching the content of Le Ai Siem's poetry. It can be said that writing about the theme of homeland is also the poet's strength. From there, we can see the inner voice, thoughts and feelings that the author has expressed. With the emotions of a poet, Le Ai Siem has created very delicate verses, images close to daily life, so they easily penetrate people's hearts. Therefore, Le Ai Siem's poetry is verses that are refined from the true life of life and the desire to live, to suffer and the love and faith of his own soul.

#### 4.2 Theme of Human Fate in Le Ai Siem's Poetry

Le Ai Siem's soul is very sensitive and thoughtful. His poems have humanistic values, are full of philosophy, and are worthy of respect. Le Ai Siem has understood life from many aspects. The images and fates of people in his poems are still small people, anonymous lives, the beauty of hardship and sadness in life in society. That is the image of a beggar, without a place to stay, living a lonely life in the darkness of the night in a poor neighborhood: The wind passed through the poor neighborhood/ Leaving behind the beggar's tattered hat / Printing on the wall four-fifths of his hungry life/ He walked into the darkness/ Towards the rotten canal. (Poem: Shelter). That fate is no different from the girl in the Cinderella song, facing the poverty, the confinement of material things, the difficulties and

deprivation of the ruined house corner: You just keep growing, nothing can stop you/ In the ruined house corner/ Where the rats are everywhere at night/ The sound of scraping pots scratches your memories. (Poem: Cinderella's Dream).

Poverty is not a sin. In life, sometimes due to certain circumstances, people cannot easily overcome their own fate. In that poverty and deprivation, people still have the right to dream of a brighter tomorrow and hope that life will change: Cinderella's dream polishes every day/ Cinderella's dream knocks open the door/ Sleepwalking feet pull you across the flower carpet/ Sleepwalking hands place before your lips golden branches and jade leaves/ Sleepwalking eyes flash high-rise buildings/ The prince's shoe forgotten from long ago. (Poem: Cinderella's Dream). The fate of those people, their lives are compared by Le Ai Siem to the bottom of a funnel, always having to live in a difficult, cramped situation in a suffocating, chaotic, and bustling society dominated by the power and influence of money: The wind blows through the fate of people/ the lives at the bottom of the funnel/ floating in poverty/ floating in desire. (Poem: Bottom of the Funnel) The selfishness and greed for fame and profit have trampled on people, forcing many to follow what is contrary to the traditional morality of our ancestors. Le Ai Siem understood the truly pitiful fates. They are the beggars, or the Cinderella girls who still maintain their self-respect and the pure beauty of their fate. Le Ai Siem made a very unique comparison. The beautiful image of the lotus flower is compared to the fate of the girl "close to the mud but not tainted by the smell of mud": I restrain myself to become a lotus / Not entangled in the mud, although I rely on the mud to live / I try to be a firefly / To know that I am not an accomplice to the night. (Poem: Firefly).

The market mechanism, the stimulant for social growth, has revealed negative aspects, making people startled. These are the disturbing, unpleasant, and eye-catching phenomena that are being exposed to society: The roads without shadows of people walking/ The shadows that walk without people/ It seems that the heads have disappeared somewhere/ The shadows with their heads / Stepping out of the doors of luxury cars/ Stepping out of A B parties begging/ Stepping out after a sharing/ Stepping out after climbing the mountain / Stepping out of imaginary glories. (Poem: Shadows without people) People are willing to trade their honor and traditional morality for unreal wealth, fake glory, all-night debauchery, hatred, lies, etc. Reading Le Ai Siem's poetry, we can easily recognize the contrast between nobility and baseness, good and bad, between the present and the past. The poem is both bitter and deeply sympathetic to the fates of street vendors, scrap metal sellers, and rickshaw pullers, whose fates are as cruel as the leaning loads of goods before their drifting fates in life: On the sidewalk are imprints of footsteps/ The footprints of parrots carry a miserable life/ Eight men's crippled shoulders cripple the neighborhood/ The rickshaw pulls the clouds and sky/ The rickshaw pulls the fate/ The cicadas' voices continue to call out their hardships/ The rusty sound leaks through the afternoon sky/ The footprints of rickshaw pullers deviate from the streets/ Wetting the hunched backs, squeezing out all the drops of hard work. (Poem: Sidewalk). That is the

vagueness of things and human fate before the changes of society. The people who entertain themselves are full of evil before the wild life in the city: The roads cast no shadows/ The shadows walk without people/ It seems like the heads have sunk into the ground/ Like the shadows of flower stalks/ Entering dimly lit buildings. (Poem: The dimly lit buildings)

The path that the girl took, when she suddenly realized that her fate was too fragile and small before the harsh challenges of life, like a boat having to withstand a great storm: I made myself a deep abyss/ To then visit and miss/ To deeply worry about things that are not clear/ I am alone but keep flying against the wind/ The sky is immense, I am alone with small wings/ The sea is immense, I am just a boat. (Poem: Footsteps). Awakening came to the little girl after the hustle and bustle of life in the city. Then she realized that only her mother's arms, her mother's breath, her mother's sweet lullaby could nourish her and only her mother could be the support for her to walk firmly in life. Although her mother's life was very difficult and arduous with the heavy burdens on her shoulders, it was honest, it was genuine, it was human morality. Then the mother's lullaby echoed in the heartache and that lullaby became immortal and nothing could replace it: Oh.../ Wandering the horizon/ Half a life carrying life and going/ The horizon will have branches of forget-me-not/ Hard work drenches the road every day/ Hard work makes you empty-handed/ Hunger and poverty only know how to borrow human love/ Why sell your life cheaply. (Poem: Lullaby).

Writing about people in today's society, Le Ai Siem constantly pondered. Where will those people and their fates go and where will they return in such a busy and competitive life? The author expressed his feelings of sharing, respect and sympathy, sending precious messages, containing contemplation and philosophy about human fate, about the fragile beauty of the market economy. Le Ai Siem praised people who know how to overcome circumstances to return to goodness and kindness. Although life is hard and poor, what is precious about them is their nobility and sincere affection.

### 4.3. Theme of Love between Couples

Love is like a love song, resonating with the hearts of like-minded souls. Love is the power that helps people overcome everything to live a useful life, to know how to love, to sympathize and share with a sincere heart, without selfishness or lies. On the contrary, love can give us faith and forgiveness! Le Ai Siem has expressed emotions in love with many levels. Each poet has a different way of expressing love. Le Ai Siem's love is very gentle. It is a secret, one-sided love, not daring to reveal it, so as to collect loving memories to keep the heart from being cold. Through the years, that love poem remains intact in the heart: I still give you a poem/ Half of my life I haven't had time to write/ Ten years of you/ The monsoon wind like a bird has taken it all away/ Only leaving me a few drops of afternoon sunlight/ I collect them to warm my heart from being cold. (Poem: Poem).

Echo is not like its name, it did not dissolve into nothingness gently but it became an echo, lingering and

unremitting, awakening many sweet memories that had turned into illusions. Le Ai Siem turned to the invisible world and pondered the immortality of longing in the heart of a lover: Maybe it is not you/ I vaguely hear an echo/ Far away from the resounding heartbeat, The heartbeat makes me miss you for decades. (Poem: Echo). The mood of a lover is full of sobs, if one day they are separated, it would be very sad! Le Ai Siem expressed the feeling of being separated from a lover that has become a scar of the alluvial soil, always calling back to the crescent moon to the point of "wearing out the question mark", becoming the main evidence of tragic love: The day I left you/ the city suddenly became soulless/ I was in the middle of the street but the street was no longer me/ I was in the afternoon but the afternoon was no longer me/ the moon was crescent to wear out the question mark/ Did you ever exist in the past. (Poem: The day I left you).

Forgetting so many memories that are not easily faded in the heart of a lover. But those are memories of the past, those are the pains, the endless longing, so that Le Ai Siem is sad and thoughtful: You forgot me in a corner of life/ I only know how to sing a sad song behind the spider web/ I don't understand why we forgot each other in hardship/ So that the horizon tells us to dig up the pain. (Poem: Forgetting). Le Ai Siem uttered the passionate words of a heart in love. That heart throbbed endlessly and even had to beat in a bag of tears: My love/ My heart has jumped out of my chest so many times/ Beating wildly and unrestrainedly for you/ Beating twice or three times faster/ Because it had to beat for another heart/ How many times has my heart beaten in a bag of tears (Poem: Afternoon). When a lover gets married, suffering is inevitable, all the memories, joys and sorrows are now only for the one who stays: I followed my husband in the purple winter of Lang Son/ Forgetting the times he came back/ In the autumn afternoon, the dusty rain made my hair fly/ On the mossy wall, there are rows of purple morning glory flowers. (Poem: Autumn). Sacrifice in love is noble, there is nothing to regret, as long as the person you love is happy, even though there is a separation, the longing is still gnawing and lingering: I brought with me a first kiss/ Recalling the innocent and miserable days/ The city is filled with longing at both ends/ Longing follows the path of the sun/ Longing is the path of the birds/ Longing lingers in the clouds/ Roaring and lingering throughout this life. (Poem: Kiss).

Happiness is very simple. When being next to the lover, the hand touching the hair is enough to make him flutter. The love in Le Ai Siem's poetry is gentle. From the

feeling of the lover's smooth hair: My hand sleeps well in your hair/ You sleep well in my very light breath/ The black hair quietly/ Quietly extends/ Extends my five fingers. (Poem: My Five Fingers). Consciousness in love is always precious. Le Ai Siem is the same, the author expressed the emotions in love so intensely full of the flavor of love, the harmony between emotions and life, love nurtured by life: I am a spike flower/ Leading the way for you to run/ The rebellious flower of the past / Holding a dimple/ But please don't take it back/ If the spike is stuck in my heart / How can I bear all the sand dunes of Central Vietnam. (Poem: Spike Flower). Love in Le Ai Siem's poetry is a distillation from the heart, a harmony between emotions and life, no matter how far apart or separated, only through pain can there be happiness. All is to make love more beautiful, life more colorful.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Reading Le Ai Siem's poetry, we can feel the author's artistic style. The poet used figurative language that is very close to everyday speech. The poet used verses with melodious and sweet tones. It seems that the author has inherited the language and expression of folk songs. The verses are simple, familiar, and expressive, like lullabies that easily penetrate people's hearts. It can be said that the art in poetry is quite diverse in tone, sometimes sweetly singing, sometimes deep, sometimes searching, sometimes mixed with a bit of sweet innocence. Poet Le Ai Siem has made great contributions to Vietnamese literature.

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