

5. The Gift in Wartime

About the Author

Tran Mong Tu was born and grown up in Hai Dong, North Vietnam in 1943. She worked for Associated Press in South Vietnam in the 1960s. She moved to the US in 1975 after South Vietnam fall. Tran had wanted to be a writer since elementary school, but her poetry was not published until she reached the United States. Today, she frequently contributes poems and short stories to Vietnamese literary publications in the US and other countries. "War is a terrible thing," says Tran, who has first-hand experience of the Vietnam War (1954-1975). According to Tran, "The Vietnam War is a shameful experience, for both Vietnamese and Americans." Many people in both countries felt the terrible tragedy of the war. Losses in the war were heavy, more than two million Vietnamese and 57,000 Americans died.

In the poem 'The Gift in Wartime!', Tran addresses an absent person. For example, as she says, "I offer you roses," the person to whom she is speaking is not present and can neither hear nor understand what she is saying

Summary

The poem 'The Gift of Wartime' is written by Tran Mong Tu. She is a Vietnamese poet. In this poem, Tran addresses an absent person. The person who she is speaking to can neither hear nor understand what she is saying. She mourns the futility of lives lost in war. Her attitude towards war is scornful and bitter.

In the poem, Tran has used verbal irony. By using verbal irony, she tries to draw the attention of the readers. In this technique, she uses the words which are employed to mean the opposite of their intended meaning. For example, she uses the word 'gift' in wartime which is not a real gift but it is grief and loss.

There are seven stanzas in the poem. The first stanza of the poem is opened with the speaker offering roses and a wedding gown in her husband's tomb or grave. The speaker is given medals, silver stars, and a badge by her husband. These items seem to be less meaningful and personal than the items that the speaker offers

The speaker's youth is offered to her husband. The days they were still in love. He gives her the smell of blood. The speaker's youth is gone when she is told the bad news. The speaker is given the smell of blood from her husband's war dress. These offerings are insignificant to her.

The speaker gives her husband clouds of summer. She offers her cold winters and springs for him. He remains unmoved by these offerings. In return, he gives the speaker lips with no smile, arms without tenderness and eyes with no sight as he is dead.

The speaker deeply apologizes to her husband about her complain regarding his offerings. She promises to meet him in their next life along with proof that has divided them from each other. She promises to hold the shrapnel as a token with the help of which they know and recognize each other in next life.