

especially if she is very young. Both Dạ Thảo Phương and V.N.H. were in their twenties at the time of the incidents, while the accused was a man who held an important position in the bureaucracy (in the case of V.N.H.) or an administrative officer assisting a senior official (in the case of Dạ Thảo Phương). As the old story goes: a young girl is unreliable and capable of making things up; her word is not to be taken seriously. Indeed, it seems that this backlash discourages young women from reporting abuse.

At the time of writing this essay, nearly two months have passed since the revelations of Dạ Thảo Phương. The momentum has dissipated on social media. Nevertheless, looking on the bright side, Dạ Thảo Phương's decision to go public about her sexual violence experience may pave the way for the public disclosure of rape incidents, no matter how long ago an assault occurred. In addition, amendments to two major laws on gender-related issues—including the Law on Gender Equality (No. 73/2006/QH11) and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (No. 02/2007/QH12)—are still ongoing. There is hope that an institutional change in existing provisions related to the elimination of violence against women and girls may still be possible in the near future.

NGUYỄN THU HƯƠNG is associate professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hà Nội. This essay has benefited from the editorial advice of Van Nguyen-Marshall, Martha Lincoln, and Peter Zinoman. The author is solely responsible for any mistakes and shortcomings that may exist.

1. DẠ THẢO PHƯƠNG

Translated by Trần Thảo Uyên

My Rapist Is Now the Deputy Editor in Chief of Văn Nghệ Newspaper

Originally posted on Facebook by Dạ Thảo Phương on April 6, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/dathaophuongvn/posts/115695031084310>.

April 3 is my birthday, the date that my parents brought me into the world.

On my birthday this year, I would love to be reborn—by shedding light on a truth that I have been burying in silence and agony for twenty-three years.

My story presented here may seem overly long; it has lasted half of the time that I have been on Earth. It is full of pain, loss, and injustice.

I hope my voice will be heard.

I hope to be reborn in a world illuminated by Truth, Honesty, and Humanity.

Thank you.

Dạ Thảo Phương

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Independence—Freedom—Happiness

Open Letter

Denunciation of Rape Committed by Lương Ngọc An—deputy editor in chief of *Văn Nghệ* newspaper and a member of the executive board of the Vietnam Writers' Association

To: Mr. Nguyễn Quang Thiều, Poet, Chairperson of the Vietnam Writers' Association

To: Mr. Trần Đăng Khoa, Poet, Vice-chairperson of the Vietnam Writers' Association

To: Mr. Nguyễn Bình Phương, Writer, Vice-chairperson of the Vietnam Writers' Association

To: The Executive Board of the Vietnam Writers' Association

To: Mr. Khuất Quang Thụy, Writer, Editor in Chief of *Văn Nghệ*

To: The Editorial Board of *Văn Nghệ*

To: All writers, artists, intellectuals, and literary arts lovers

My name is Dạ Thảo Phương (legal name: Phan Thị Thanh Thúy; DOB: April 3, 1974). From 1996 to 2003, I worked as a reporter and an editor at

Văn Nghệ Trẻ [Young Literature and Arts] newspaper, a subsidiary of *Văn Nghệ* newspaper and subordinate unit of the Vietnam Writers' Association.

I am writing this letter to expose and denounce a case of rape and slander committed against me by Lương Ngọc An, currently the deputy editor in chief of *Văn Nghệ* and a member of the executive board of the Vietnam Writers' Association.

I am ready to confront Lương Ngọc An in the presence of the leaders of the Vietnam Writers' Association, the leaders of *Văn Nghệ* newspaper, my husband, and our lawyers. If Lương Ngọc An refuses to engage with my accusations in public and in the presence of these parties, it will demonstrate clearly that all his fabrications are libelous garbage.

If Lương Ngọc An believes that my denunciation is false, he is welcome to sue me.

I WAS RAPED

On the afternoon of April 14, 2000, when I was alone in the editorial office of *Văn Nghệ Trẻ*, Lương Ngọc An rushed in and attempted to rape me. In a panic, I resisted and cried out for help. When colleagues ran to the office, they caught Lương Ngọc An red-handed. He was on top of me, strangling me while I squirmed to resist. My dress was crumpled and my finger was bleeding. Thanks to the intervention of my colleagues, his attempted rape was not successful. Witnesses reported what they had observed in a statement sent to *Văn Nghệ* on April 20, 2000 (attached to this Facebook status).

But this was the only time that I was lucky enough to escape from Lương Ngọc An's contemptible behavior.

Before the incident, between July 1999 and April 2000, Lương Ngọc An had been manipulating me, controlling me, abusing me, and raping me as a sex slave.

I WAS SLANDERED

When the incident occurred, I was a young girl in my twenties and single. I had started working at *Văn Nghệ* right after graduating from college. All my knowledge back then came from books. I had a passion for creativity, but I possessed little in the way of life experience.

I was born in a traditional northern Vietnamese family that feared gossip. When I was attacked, I was less concerned for myself than for my family. I was petrified that if rumors circulated about me related to men, my parents would die from humiliation.

As a young woman in those days, my only defense was to try to resist Lương Ngọc An's disgusting actions fiercely and to the point of exhaustion. But I did not dare to cry for help or denounce the perpetrator. I was too scared to reveal the rapes.

Because of this fear, I never told this story to anyone, not the organization, not the public, not even my mother. After being raped by Lương Ngọc An, I became pregnant and could not carry my first child to term. I had to keep to myself this indescribable pain that has haunted me relentlessly until now.

Thanks to the many witnesses of the aforementioned incident on April 14, 2000, I mustered the courage to denounce Lương Ngọc An's sexual assault in writing. But he was fearless. Not only did he not express regret for his actions, but he flagrantly slandered me. Lương Ngọc An faked a defamatory story in which he and I had had an affair and he had tried to break up with me. He changed the nature of the incident on April 14, 2000, from a rape to a "fight"! This fabrication was both flagrant and absurd. I had never been in a relationship or consented to have sex with Lương Ngọc An. All of the sexual intercourse that took place between us occurred in the form of rape accomplished with violence and threats.

He wrote a false statement in which he claimed that he wanted to end the affair and "intentionally avoid contacting" me. But if this was the case, why did he rush into the editorial office when I was alone and force me down violently?

I was just a small, vulnerable woman. He was a man in his thirties, a former soldier in a tank platoon, and a seasoned driver for *Văn Nghệ*. I wasn't strong enough to pull him into the office and force him down on my body. If I had wanted to hold on to him, why would I have resisted so fiercely that he bit my finger? Why would I have cried out so loudly that he tried to strangle me?

If I had consented, why would I have called his family and girlfriend to seek protection from being stalked by Lương Ngọc An? He attributed my phone calls to "jealousy," but his mistress at the time affirmed to

representatives of the *Văn Nghệ* newspaper union that I was not jealous. (Minutes of the meeting on March 26, 2003, at *Văn Nghệ*—since this detail concerns another woman who is married, I have not published the document here yet.)

I have always denied his blatant lies clearly in every complaint, demanding that he take responsibility, and insisting that the organization maintain clear documentation about the nature of this matter.

The office's leader directly handling my case was Mr. Trương Vĩnh Tuấn—at the time deputy editor in chief, in charge of *Văn Nghệ*'s administration and the *Văn Nghệ Trẻ* team. Lương Ngọc An had been an administrative officer for many years, specializing in driving and assisting Mr. Trương Vĩnh Tuấn. I could not understand why, given Lương Ngọc An's behavior, the organization concluded that he only “caused a disturbance at the workplace”?! In meetings, Mr. Trương Vĩnh Tuấn repeatedly described the incident as “two people fighting, which caused workplace disorder.”

Mr. Trương Vĩnh Tuấn repeatedly prevented me from exercising my right to make a formal accusation. He also bullied and slandered me and prevented me from publishing articles. He threatened to fire me. Many meetings and documents related to the incident were initially hidden from me and never brought to the attention of our office. The ambiguous attitude of the leaders of the office at that time raised questions about me, causing severe damage to my honor and mental health.

Lương Ngọc An, the perpetrator, has never accepted responsibility for his rape and his slander of me. He still visited the offices of *Văn Nghệ* on a regular basis and took private meetings with Deputy Editor in Chief Trương Vĩnh Tuấn. In April 2002, he officially returned to work at *Văn Nghệ*. And at present, he is the deputy editor in chief of *Văn Nghệ* and a member of the executive board of the Vietnam Writers' Association!

This represents a trampling of Truth and a mockery of Justice.

WHY AM I SPEAKING UP NOW?

The crimes of rape and libel committed by Lương Ngọc An and the bullying and false accusations by Trương Vĩnh Tuấn have never been recognized

publicly. The darkness of Evil weighing on the Truth of the past has continued to haunt me.

During the time that I was being beaten and raped, bullied and slandered, I attempted suicide many times. The episode damaged my ability to communicate; there were times when it was difficult to communicate with my husband and children in daily conversation. I lost my connection to language and avoided showing up in the literary world. As a writer who loved life and identified herself through her creative work, this pain was profoundly destructive for me.

Lately, I have been following stories in which the victims of sexual assault denounced their perpetrators. Reading negative comments like a rain of knives pouring down on them and their loved ones; I was shocked. The demon, the sexual abuse perpetrator, that has shattered the life of a young girl—me, twenty-three years ago—continues to hunt for its next victims. Ignorant people have a tendency to attack and blame the victim, which unintentionally makes this demon more and more dangerous.

This situation needs to change.

I do not want any more victims to suffer the agony that I have been through. I need to speak up. This is an urgent demand that I feel personally, as a victim of unjust suffering, and this is also a requirement for a responsible citizen and a conscientious writer.

I understand that my situation occurred in the past. Some of you might have heard a part of the story but have not known the Truth; many have no idea or are not involved. I was too frightened to unveil my pain. I do not want my denunciation to impact anyone other than the perpetrator himself.

But I must write this denunciation because Lương Ngọc An, the perpetrator of rape against me, still has not once accepted responsibility for his sins. In other words, he has not demonstrated any manifestation of repentance or self-correction. Now he is on the editorial board of *Văn Nghệ*, and he is a member of the executive board of the Vietnam Writers' Association, where there should only be writers who are both talented and moral enough to take charge of recruiting talent and developing Vietnamese literature. Twenty-three years ago, when Lương Ngọc An raped me, he was only

a driver who had recently been promoted to reporter for *Văn Nghệ*; he had no special power or position.

Now his depravity has expanded its reach as he has climbed the ladder of leadership, achieving even more power. His current position allows him to be in contact with many freelancers, artists, and intellectuals, including many young women, and to make decisions about their careers.

Thus, I feel that I have a responsibility to expose this truth to you, the literary world, intellectuals, and the community—to contribute to exposing and preventing this Evil.

EXPECTATIONS

I am now a 48-year-old married woman. My husband is 52 and an experienced reporter who works at one of the most prestigious news agencies in the world. My son is 14, and my daughter is 6. My parents are now old and weak. They look forward to living the rest of their days in peace and watching their children and grandchildren living happily and securely.

Standing up to expose this truth, I know that I am putting my stable life and my family at risk of hurt and danger.

But I have no other choice.

I hope this Truth will be heard and met with useful action to make our community less polluted and more civilized.

This means a lot to me as well as to many other sexual assault victims who suffer silently in the dark.

I hope that others who may have suffered from sexual violence will find that they are no longer entirely alone and afraid to speak up and that they will no longer have to spend more than twenty precious years of their lives striving to patch up their agony in silence, as I once did.

My heartfelt thanks.

Nicosia, April 3, 2022

Sincerely,

Dạ Thảo Phương

(Phan Thị Thanh Thúy)



FIGURE 1: Dạ Thảo Phương, December 2021. Photo by David Vujanovic.

2. DẠ THẢO PHƯƠNG

Translated by Cao Ngọc Đoan Trang

The Light

Originally posted on Facebook by Dạ Thảo Phương on April 8, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/dathaophuongvn/posts/pfbidoBiG7n67Nn5acpkxmQQtAgmMW3P4B1ZHPmySh4EXz4uF5JBrkEL2qs792BYBpubzl>.

I have been a victim of violence, rape, slander, and retaliation.

These matters have gravely assaulted my dignity, but they have not taken it away completely or debased its value.

Therefore, I share this public denunciation—without hiding my face, without hiding my identity, taking responsibility before the law, the public, and my conscience.