

THE MAUSOLEUM

by

Anne Le

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Graduate Faculty

of

George Mason University

in Partial Fulfillment of

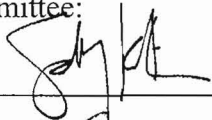
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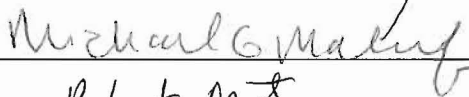
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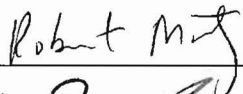
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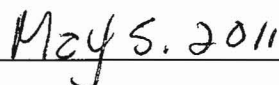


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Date:



Spring Semester 2011
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

The Mausoleum

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University.

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Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2007

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Spring Semester 2011
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to Hao Thị Ngô.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my teachers, Eric Pankey, Jennifer Atkinson, Ben Doller, Michael Malouf, Helon Habila, and especially Sally Keith, and Susan Tichy for all of their guidance—my sincere gratitude to them. I wish to thank my peers for their thoughtful insights on my writing, and for sharing with me their work over these past three years. I wish to thank my mother for sharing all of her stories from Vietnam and of her journey here to the United States; to her I am indebted.

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ABSTRACT

THE MAUSOLEUM

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George Mason University, 2011

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This is a collection of poems set in a mythological Việt Nam.

THE MAUSOLEUM

THE FLOATING CAKE

“My body is white; my fate, softly rounded,
Rising and sinking like mountains in streams.
Whatever way hands may shape me,
At center my heart is red and true.”

- Hồ Xuân Hương, translated from the Vietnamese by John Balaban

BEHEMOTH

I, resigning in the meadow of the deep deep grass,
 quivered all night, writing in each season a way to conquer
the waves.

Salt the cavity
 deeply furrowed in my heart, to find the waves
wrecked in this house. Moor me against the walls.

Light America, and all of the trees burnt in sap,
 on the road of men sitting in starvation
to the sea's violent disposition.

In high tide or low tide,
 leap into the carcass of the sea, where mounds
of waves wash by.

At night, wield the water like arrows through wind.

THE MAUSOLEUM

Burnt umber of casket, they will flock
like the convoys of the French to
ruin. Sitting with porcelain
dishes in their laps, the party awaits
the master everyday from nine till
noon, bathing smooth in the photograph
of the shadow. Vaseline skin smooth as a persimmon,
I want to caress this moon. Granaries
of cremation, why not
save land. Rigor mortis, break
the bones. Relief for the undertaker undoing
your clothes. Limber rubbish, and robes; iron
the fiber; germinate with steam; manure depository; nest of ruby
blossom. Embalm this southern body of your land.
Carcass of preservation, you are
½ meticulous, 866 seconds alive seeking
decay. Heavy bison, thirsting for the sun.
Save room for wandering the bridge
behind that wild impulse, threadbare and white as
Whitman's hair. The mineral-life extraction begins
in the bounty of splattered misfortune; this one
beginning with the flint and stone, flayed
on the harquebus wounding. Sap sighing down the tree.
Ho Chi Minh murmuring
through the eucalyptus tree, languid and heavy.

THE DUCHESS

Anarchy in the water
garden. She pulling all
alone in her boat.
Reaches the end of the
burnt roots.
Darkness in the
grassland.
The lotus head sliced
and boiled in the sutler's
pot,
puts to sleep the
uncharted, quarreling
sun.
Hao Thị Ngô plotting
poisoned plums in the
sacks
plundering
 through
tar.
Unwraps the wax paper.
A bosom
of milky
aubades nesting.
Meets the fisherman
halfway slipping in hand
into the ploy of the
night.

THE DUCHESS

In some sweet days, carry me
home to forgetfulness.
Lotus-eater of the widowed
night, like dead bees in the
hive: banal men waking in
the slender fog.

THE DUCHESS

Sallow Old World.
Apparitions curdling honey at
the table. Versailles, still
some millions of miles away.

SEASONS OF WAR

16° 10' N, 107° 50' E

IN THE MAUSOLEUM OF VIETNAM

Heavy body of rain, come lather
their carcasses whom sleep all night.
Exhume this corpse of the southern land, up heaving
its roots and limbs, embalmed in centuries of lament;
him lying on the banks of the Mekong Delta, buries
the dead all day, powdering the corpses with gunpowder.
I wait in the jungle for half a century;
the muslin, taut between four poles of the house, weighs down
with decaying pine needles.
Opium storm lathering the banks in delusion,
we strung ropes through trees to gather
the moths of death.
In the sober spar of love, everything saturated with light
gets lit in yearning. Ply the mouth open
to enter into darkness.
Lead me into the banks seeping
with indigo, peeling its crust into the shore,
where each night washes away.
Lather the hide until its pouting skin wanes
into translucent sheets. Them lurking in the jungle,
send signals to keep quiet. I with my pockets filled with rain.

IN THE MAUSOLEUM OF ORANGE

Astray during bombings, I gathered soot
to pour into the wounds of darkness.
We rummaged through betel leaves, crushing
defoliated branches. Dank fetus of the night,
the isles carried typhoid in the poppy fields.
Some say, if this river is empty, don't come down the south end,
but I wander into it anyways.

Him roaming in roots of the tangled artery,
imagines the blurry lights of the city on the bank.
Forgetting the drifting rain, he crawls
underneath the falling pine needles.
Slur of the ligature, every plane carried silence across
the desolate field.
Under waxy, under oilcloth sheets, we hid
under the surface of water where they wouldn't look
underneath the bodies floating downriver.

MAUSOLEUM OF LIONS

Thus finding the forest, him chase the lion
through snowdrift;
in the valley beyond, them lain
on the land of sleepiness, nod
their languid heads. I with my broken arrows.
In wait, in anguish, in nightfall, in death,
How do you tame a lion?
Wrong ten paces, I a thousand minutes lost.
Wandering too far, I open my compass.
East + West + North + South
them somber sun burns out;
we pour this kerosene into tar.
Moths pinioned to branches,
doze to sleep in the naphthalene hive.
Snowdust + Sapphire + Sanctuary + Lust
Him who carries the sack
of hair, proves he's caressed the lion's head.

MAUSOLEUM OF MOUNTAINS

Thy nesting deep in the valley below, slumber the drought
through darkness; I steal bits of mane to cross
the gates of burial. On wanton mountains, on frosted boughs,
him awaits the melting snow.

In the 17th century, thy swallowed a pearl
to be carried into forgetfulness.

Pushing wind that roars, them wander into the valley.

Him looking onto I, undresses me for sleep.

MAUSOLEUM OF THE UNBURIED

Saunter of the rogue sun burning
in the valley, drying the skin
inside a lion, pulled and hung on ropes
strung between weighed down branches.
Him cutting the flesh, is covered in the wet
blood of the feverous field. Them who wander
of thirst, come falling into the valley
of the unburied dead, decaying in muslin sheets.

MADAM HAO THI NGO'S LETTERS TO HER LOVE

13 JUNE 1938

In the borough come the interpreter
to the apothecary. Him with his eyes closed

in the back room, caresses my palms for lines.
In wilted banana leafs, rain collects and drips.

Woman whom waits for the bus, spills
a bag of tomatoes on the street. Too late

to bend and pick them up, for traffic rushing
along the circle brings wind.

Him say the lion come quickly,
but I want to come lucky.

A woman nags her husband
on the street in front of their house.

Him on his knees pleading for mercy, tries to do away
his staying out all night. She slaps him until he is silent.

Sagging on roofs, palms burn in the sun.
Men scaling trees, lop the heads off.

17 JUNE 1938

Named the Palace of Sabotage, him dare not touch
his princess burnt for loot.

To wander, take a sword to thy lion roaming
the old alley whose walls are fermented with urine.

Then when the skin burns, leave the body
in water to cool, peeling off the darkened layer.

The rain coming too soon again, floods the streets to the doors.
We stuff rags into the crevice. For two days,

no one ventures outside. Above where the telephone wires droop,
I watch the theatre house across the street hang dresses

on slabs of wood to dry. On the other side of the shutters,
the seamstress unrolls her bundles of fabric on the floor.

Beckoning a young girl to come forward, the peddlers
holler *o la la, la li, la lo*. Them having gone digging for clams

in the mud, roll up their pant legs to douse their feet
with buckets of water. The interpreter unfolding the vellum map,

smears his oiled fingers across the street lines.
Oxen in the canal, pull sacks of rice to the back entrances of houses.

Them with their trays slathered in dried tomatoes,
separate the flesh from the seed. These days in Sai Gon, Uncle Ho

has decided to go off on excursions to the west. And the French
all tower over him on the bridge, listening to legends of the foreigner.

The boatswain throwing bark and seed into the flooded streets,
smashes some against the windows.

21 JUNE 1938

I stuck star of anise in your coat pocket. Plant it when you reach the shore.

Come lucky in the apothecary with drawers full of honey and fodder;
we stuff our kettles to the gunwale spilling with seeped branches of red-red dates.

Thick in the burly hair of the nest, she grooms the curtains until she's no longer ill.
Lolling in the shade, he throws a handful of shrimp onto the scale.

You went looking for your father's letters, but all you found was poetry.

I draw your face in charcoal blind folded,
but you end up looking sad. Behind trees in the forests,

you go seeking, but don't find me.

PHOTOGRAPH I: NAPHTHALENE HIVE

Thieving
in sodden hills, I caught her stuffing
a dove with fern branches, pinning its soft wings together.
She begging on her knees
to go like fog over
the city of glass,
leapt onto the gnarled
branch, where black moths
clinging to the rasping leaves,

ease in June. Caressing the carcass
she dropped, I unfurled the warm feathers—a field of cotton
blossoming. Woman who loves me, she calls, covering my eyes
with gauze.

PHOTOGRAPH II: DEEP RIVER

Deep river, we
jumped into the brimming
water like
dead wasps extinguished
in the gossamer hive. On the soft palate of the
earth, I crawled through the wet marrow of the bones,
white as the veiled women in the cartographer's book.
She who pulls the clouds of fabric,
up heaves the Dragon Mountains by an inch.

NAPHTHALENE

dwelling on one's own body

at deep sleep----- : stupor

that dulls the sense

recite: slender passage

spurred and pungent----- :

open country proceeding in light

song, not undulating. rainmaking-----:

furious whistle thinning

glass and wallpaper glue

brandished the naked bird neck

to curve, a burial of mourning garments

one joule hanging as a moth

a unit of distance
or rosin:

a seedless orange

now casein and carnage-----:

lie in a canoe full of water

RUIN

Rain lapping down thighs, we nestled

in the groves. Sunken

artery line in an atlas—walking for miles looking
for the peak through soiled white sheets.

You plied open a door
of clouds, emptying a pot of boiled water from last night.

It was as if we had slathered
on gunpowder, walking in the fog. The deer came sniffing.

SOUND CHANGE

Sound: not diseased or sickly;
entering the ocean's waves.
Long passage of water
wider than the dive through the cloudy south pole—
the supreme state sowed.
Scattering wood louse. A sauce made in
brine.
Forage its mineral
spring with an inverted heart
at the bottom.
Fleshy or succulent, I thin strings:
the spread (as of an arch)
from one support to another.
Driven together as tufts,
mild-flavored. Spar pins,
kindled to ignite the fuel.
O, o, o, luxury.
Thy bony utter—
to address language, spear fish;
draw out (fiber) and twist
into thread.
Turn and reel the backbone.
To thicken the cord, manipulate the center,
getting closer to, or farther away

THE FISH HOUSE AT GÒ VẤP

Like cooked thick white vermicelli noodles
the laundry sheets dragged back and forth down
the river. At night only steam could be seen lifting
into the sunless sky. Over to the west
the cranes glided to nest in the trees.

A fisherman mirrors his wife throwing the heavy net into the water to pull up
fifty eels at a time, fat and squirming they are plump
with the bloody water of surgical gauzes and cotton balls dumped
into the basin between two sewage pipes. After the fall of Sài Gòn
all the cotton fields were burnt. The air soft and dewy, when touched,
felt like clumps of wet feathers.

Undressed in the fish house, the woman sat perspiring
with her eyes closed in the dark listening
to the sound of bamboo
splintering in the wind. The fisherman limping,
gathered up the slivers on the ground
and set them against one another to make a teepee. Before igniting
the fire to smoke the eels, he crouched
inside upon the soil and was muted by the scene.

HAPPY YEAR TO MY COUNTRY IN DARKNESS

Sonorous cyclo, for Hòa Thị Ngô, humming
in the valley of the unburied dead.
Some sweet days the furnace
would burn the swallows wingless, whilst

the monsoon swooning
on the upper floor
slathered on planks
of birch, lathered in

palm oil dank
as the paramilitary men
behind the weeping bush,
too dry to drink even on the

evenings of libation.
Deep in the rasping
chorales of the
snapping locusts I

studied evenings while my country
turned into rain, washing
through the valley
of the unburied dead

of soft pulp, rosy as the nectar
of papayas pungent and

submerged in a century
of laments for the king

husked on a bed of shrouds
endless and billowing
in an aged city whose rusty
garden was emaciated,

or was it emancipated?
I wait gnawing on
the flabby legs of the quail

hunting through the filaments
of litter reverberating
along the meadows
to return to the traffic

of darkness I wait and
behold the jungle
opaque in gunpowder
fertilizing

the motionless painting of clouds
pouring rain pouring tonight into
a canopy where she bathes

hoarse in the throat from mourning

for her king whose
daughter fled through the
rivers of the quiescence
fuming deep

in the furnace of the upper
floor tonight I study tonight

I study whilst the paramilitary
hunting deep in the jungle

of Hao Thị Ngô , humming
in the valley deep
below, rasping billow

billow through the open mouth
of Filipino refugee tents.
In some sweet days, gather
on me as a monsoon swooning.

Tonight, do not turn away from the traffic
of darkness, as I carry you here unabashed
to lament for the dead
on this new year's day.

NGUYEN SINH KHIEM

The interpreter, diluting ink into his mouth, slowly drank, closing his eyes. Sighing through the wind, Hao Thi Ngo rolls up her pant legs, wading through mud water, swinging the satchel over her back, full of clams. Shaved the heads and let the hair fall off the blind men, with their eyes wrapped in gauze. Them lying soaked in the wrapped cloth, were pushed into the valley below. Hao Thi Ngo draining the estuary with her leathery tools to find bones.

Punctuate the borough from the water with a line of sand. Madam Hao Thi Ngo drops moths into the sea from her canoe. Him, rendering drawings of a chain of salpas engulfing water down their translucent body, pinches ridges on the paper to form lumps.

She, drying the ink-water off of her hands, hangs the drawing of Ho Chi Minh on a line. Him, undoing his shirt button, is caught in shadow. Shaking the powdery ink sac into ammonia, the interpreter smears a glob under Ho Chi Minh's chin. Looking down at his wavering beard, Madam Hao Thi Ngo strikes a few lines in black.

For three hundred days, paralyzing the 17th parallel, moths gnawed at poisoned cotton blossoms, dozing to sleep. Nguyen Sinh Khiem casting a handful of earth, descried where guerillas hid, where murdered peasants were dragged into the forests. She, making tea for the interpreter, cuts her hand on the chipped cup.

1954, GENEVA ACCORDS

Bomb craters turned into shrimp ponds----:

the nascent bodies of Vietnam

growing heredities in burnt lamps-----:

plunder through roots

drifting left, right, left----:

sent decayed men down river

what half of the demarcated line?

to rebel against one's own country

leave Nam Dinh ----:

to a dark estuary of the south

GRAMOPHONE

Was shaven the neck of the goose, placed amongst chopped heads between slabs of a cargo box, hung and fermented on a rope, strung between two chestnut trees. Was summer that swelled through the captured town of laborers who confessed to smuggled notes through gramophone necks as the sound of surrender played endlessly. Was rose marmalade that sunk down her throat when the master shot her through the open flap of her mouth, agape as the caravan back full of trunks of spools.

CRUSH

Out on the Street Gia Long, water gushes into the streets. Crush a lotus head
and the salt that runs in its veins.

How long do you think Earhart caressed the Atlantic?

Want the salt, want the hollow head
after its been broken and its seeds have fallen.

Half chopping pears, half dozing through the jejune night, get past the initial resistance
to pull up into flight. On trees, wind rips through leaves in muted light.

Wallowing in the froth of the rain, yank leaves
in the warm pond. Clear the fog, splitting the day open by light.

Round and round the bulb of brightness grows,
igniting winter's wet flesh.
The jellyfish in electric water.

Ở TRÊN ĐƯỜNG GIA LONG

Here in an inn on the street of the Emperor
ở trên đường Gia Long,
As drums snarl on like panthers in the deep deep night
ở trên đường Gia Long,
The woman dances to snapping firecrackers
ở trên đường Gia Long,
And burdened with opportunities, the pregnant hen whimpers
ở trên đường Gia Long,
Sweating like men caught in escape
ở trên đường Gia Long,
Them suffocating in the tight wooden boxes
ở trên đường Gia Long,
Till Sài Gòn slit its throat to surrender
ở trên đường Gia Long,
The world holds but a heartbeat, blood dripping in my palms
ở trên đường Gia Long,
Who calls the ghosts by their names, to come out of their barracks
ở trên đường Gia Long,
Singing in the sweet sweet bungalows
ở trên đường Gia Long,
ở trên đường Gia Long.

THE DISTRICT BEN THANH, AT HAO THI NGO'S HOUSE

Swarming, the broken sound of rain
over Hao Thi Ngo, submerged in the canal to bathe,
pretending to drown. Massaging the honeycombs of tripe
in a box full of salt and water, her husband tips his hat,
letting the pounding rain drip. *Come out, Hao, or you'll get a cold.*

==

That night under the roof of the edifice, madam tells him
about the obscurities of her life: how the previous evening,
the blind old lady playing fortuneteller stretched out her arms
and plummeted to the ground; how she had cups of water under the bed,
so she thought, to keep them from going to hell. Opening the creaking
door, she reveals to him the cabinet
she had been working on, since their son's death.
An insane tangle of coppery wire on the tiger's face, drawings of airplanes
crashing through charcoal, hundreds of light bulbs polished
with carnauba wax, a box full of snipped
black hair collected from the barber.

The waning palm tree, resting on the power line, bounces
in the wind, cutting the lights on and off. The sound of electricity
in wavering filaments, drew the fat flies closer. In the high
frequency of bulbs, she listens to the droning shrieks of opera performers
with their powdered faces in spring.

Come here. While the lonely
madam pours grains from her hand, her husband sweeps
the fallen rice with the broom. Slathering the body,
they roll the betel leaf paste to bite inside the sheaf.

==

Rolling bergamot oil on his nape,
he stains the sheets, reclining into sleep.

In the reoccurring nightmare, madam
holds a knife behind her back while her ill husband
asks for her, groping in the dark. *Hao, where are you.*

Through the peephole, an officer in olive green tears the body
of their son, out of the family portrait.

Tie a plastic bag full of water
and place it on the table to keep away flies.
Seeing her reflection through water, he startles awake.

==

Through shutters, down on the street Gia Long,
the mourners insert joss bank notes
into the funerary box.

Lying inside the hammock, he pulls the edges
closer to himself, trying to keep his cry silent.

==

Hao Thi Ngo presses the cuffs of his shirt.

With a measuring tape, she cuts the sleeves two millimeters shorter.

Waiting for the temperature to lower in the evening,
the jasmine peel open, the scent, lingering through the house.

Dancing a slow tango in the yard to the cassette,
they lean in closer, not elegant.

RAIN MOUNTAIN

Awake to the musk sauntering down the street. Throwing salt, a butcher stuffs
his hand upside down in the hollowed

stomach of the lamb. Aren't we always clinging
against the wall?

Smoke and smoke in the bazaar of zeros,
I catch a glimpse of two lovers quarreling

between the curtains. Today, the boy collects
telephone bills down the hallway, knocking

on doors. Whom can we talk to about our beloved
secrecy when this damn old sun

keeps rising? In the old days, there was no place
as lonely as this. On mountains of rain clouds,

villagers sat in matted obscurity, drinking
tea through fog so thick, they could not see their neighbor's face

down the valley. This morning in the quiescent,
wives sit stringing scaled fish in boatfuls of rain.

Monks croon in disparate chants.
Summer is a greed of light; a guitar strummer.

GOOSE

I hold it in my hands,
A picture of a boy who sings Alouette, when the rain
Hits the trees—

Clean and sleek like the plumage of a goose
My mother snaps its neck.

Here beneath the grove my father kneels for two nights
Hungry for the wind
And my mother's heart.

A snow goose is a pulse in the sky—
Blood pours into the river.

A boat lingers in the shadow to creep away;
My mother breathes silently.

Tôi cầu xin đi thuật, Tôi cầu xin đi thuật.
I have never spoken this language to someone.

Tell me how the barber caresses the boy's hair with soap,
Clean and sleek like the plumage of a goose.

Alouette, my young skylark, I will cut off your wings.

My mother tells me of the old woman
Who likes to come out when it rains.

Beneath the grove

The woman with her black betel-leaf-stained teeth
Throws a voice behind my ears in the shadows.

She says, do you remember what the barber
Whispered to the boy?

Here behind the shutters (waiting) in the dark,
An aperture opens wide.

HEART LEANING

Heart leaning, like lemongrass
In wind, roots swollen
Like a heavy moon
Chipping into Vững Tàu.

Who made
This pregnant scene?

I take a dive
In the sea at night. Water glowing
In the obscure.

Sitting in the mangosteen tree
A smallish boy says,
Are you a ghost, miss? Nôi đi. Say so.

The catcher walks barefoot down
The road with his bucket of dead crabs,
Torched like joss bank notes.

Nôi đi. Say So.

MOUNTAINS

Growing old I lie here
Waiting inside my house.
Mountains of jade on the outside
 Deep river on the inside.
Bones asleep in the kingdom.
But here it is plain in darkness.
 Humble the rain
 Falls all night sounding of rice
 Shucked and tossed.
 For soothing I will call the rain
Regret and let it go.
All night raining
 I whisper down the hall.
 Travel the slanted
River and meander
 Like a villager escaping
 In the dark.
 All night rain leaves
and returns but I still cannot find my way

IN THE SPRING OF PROSPERITY

:His barrack sinking in the marsh	Prop the dead against the barrage
:Is too tragically easy to pin the ears on the mule	Guards sneer in the elusive night; watch them go
:Men asleep in the trenches	A mouth full of exhaust fumes
:Hòa Thị Ngô sloshing through the lotus garden	Saunter of the rogue gerund floating down river
:Am extinct in the huitre of the bayou	Sojourn's tawny thread taunt around the spool
:The dumb boy standing by the window	On the bungalow of the tongue
:Bright orange khoi fish swimming	The impetus of the holy
:Paralysis approaching	These slender candles on the altar burning
:Stark bark and the hoary ash of snow	Gather in the canoe in this musty air; I'll push
:Come to America in the whimpering night	Kneel in the barrel of memory
:Mutter in the spring of prosperity	Weeping of the sibilant eve

NEW AMERICA

I.

I make it dense as linseed oil and pour
hulls of flax into a turpentine ocean.
Watch them float
like boats of naked
men on the Pacific
flat on their chests
and the gun shots
to their heads.

II.

New America lulling inside a heart.
Vermillion fields as bright
as kerosene lamps lit in the dusk.
A man goes searching
on the steep mountainside.

III.

Rain drenched cotton field swooning.
Monks blow ashes
into the woods of honeysuckle and rain.

THE SANATORIUM

I

A woman slaps herself, not recognizing her face in the mirror. *I'm not beautiful, but I try to be. Small swan rolling under the water.* String leaves on a laundry line; watch them swell and curl with heat.

II

At night, she draws a tar black panther. Over and over and over, she writes *open* and *closed*, *open* and *closed*. The lungs collapse like an accordion, breathy like an air conditioned room of diplomats and their pulled up socks.

III

At the sanatorium a man in a bath tub strokes the glassine sides with his cheek, and all his body is shadow and warm. A sad faced woman looks at the man looking at himself.

IV

The man in the tub says, "KHAR-TOUM," "KHAR-TOUM," in the softest voice like a bomb falling many miles behind the glass. Cut the valves and let the wind undulate. For all we know, there isn't anyone left.

V

Third world solidarity forsaken like a summer of oleander billowing at the big window of the sanatorium.

VI

Inside a small room, a woman pulls out an old catalogue card printed with FORSAKEN. On its lines, she studies her signatures.

THEY CALLED HER GRAVI-ĐÃ

Cast

Servant Voices of the Old World Choir

3 Dishwasher Washer Women

Noises of the New World

A Flock of Egrets

Townpeople

Not too robust or handsomely.

GRAVI-ĐÃ

A pregnant woman

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Egrets over the estuary pull and pluck at each other's feathery wings.
Rolled up pages from an almanac flown from the ceiling on harpsichord
wires are plucked as the hands of the townspeople below, yank them.
A cave of dishwasher washer women in *New World America* hunched
over a basin scrubbing things new again—the white porcelain tub fills
with water and a woman births inside. How warm the mellow climate.
Lights up over the dusty court. A row of townspeople squinting
into the sun sit on the edge of the stage with their legs dangling—
fog over the granite mountains below.

I.

They called her GRAVI-ÐÃ, and she carried
a roman numeral behind her back.

Legs splayed, situated in the estuary called Pará, Brazil.

A.

Push, Gravidá, push.

II.

This is *para* all you folk in the estuary.

B.

A fertile land –

Brackish water spreading

Tossed, I yielded.

IV.

Her dictionary was torn all about, except for 2 pages.

The first entry read: *meta*. The second read: *para*.

She wandered America not knowing Greek.

V.

Grandma says: *we're each implicated in a machinery that works to maintain the loci of power*. Don't break her china while you're at it.

VI.

At the *meta*, the race horse runs asunder

on the curve of the track –*metacarpus of its bony structure*.

The unnamed center

exercises power. Pull the wool over my eyes.

VII.

Parity, come to madam.

Ai.

GRAVI-ĐÃ *Origin: 1880-85;*
extracted from *primapara, multipara,*
whose juices are denser
than the mango bulb, etc.

Aii.

Compound words with a pestle
into a *copper coin, 40th part of a piaster.*
Trade it to the mongoloid shooting arrows at you.

Aiii.

Para, para, para! *Pertaining to or occupying two positions.*

iA.

The first position subjected to carry
alongside his majesty. The second,
deemed to always remain
five steps behind, because of her fuming
odor, dank as the black
moth standing in for death.
Blood seeps into the estuary.

THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

Escape

if you listened

across the

you could hear

Thousand Islands

a faint trace

freshwater

the ritual insane,

archipelago that
straddles

strands over,

I

under, through,

begin my trip to the
over, under, Thousand Islands.

through

Shangri-La—seems foreign

enough.

O

St.

Lawrence River,

I sink and float like a warm

flow east toward the
Atlantic.

amphibious animal

Here, where a
branch

runs south

lies the

Thousand Islands

stay above water

and support

one living tree.

1,800 islands

and riverside towns

push

Crystal clear

green forests,

and

streets swarming

with pirates

on the south bank of
the St. Lawrence

in the throes of

bacchanalia

I

robbed

with

musket

dive upscale rod-and-
tackle

to board

scenic tour of a with a great banging

the waves crowd in upon the shore,

movers and shakers

which lies foaming white

o Gilded Age flocked

with a snow that always falls

no matter what the month or year.

of fame;

I

spent a king's

since the wind is blowing high,

we are unable to set out

ransom

drift to the

garden's

playhouse

tinged with

sadness.

halt, load, then

fire

where in thousand-fathom depths

early morning

see

innocent monsters swim eternally

paradise

around wet and hidden trees

the Thousand

Islands

drifting

between Grindstone and

time

o

Gilded Age

show me the

devil

to banish the image I looked

he already had the water,

of the islands.

rooster

but he had to

around

discover jars

tail

sunset

ferry into

Thousand Islands.

the

snapping

wind

carrying

I

snow

rich

Thousand Islands

—be

a dream

overlooking a

stretch of water.

enter

the islands

that don't exist

NOTES

The epigraph, “The Floating Cake,” is from Hồ Xuân Hương’s collection, *Spring Essence*.

Madam Hao Thi Ngo’s Letters to Her Love

This title is after “Frederick Courteney Selous’ Letters to His Love,” by Matthea Harvey.

Happy Year to My Country in Darkness

This title is taken from Pablo Neruda.

Ở TRÊN ĐƯỜNG GIA LONG

This title is after “En la calle San Sebastián,” by Martín Espada.

Goose

The phrase, “Tôi cầu xin đi thuật, Tôi cầu xin đi thuật” means to plead escape.

They Called Her GRAVI-ĐÃ (aka “oo la la”)

This poem began with a game punning on dictionary.com’s history of *parody*.

The entirety of these italicized words have been scripted from dictionary.com’s entry of “para,” and “meta,” and entries tangential. “Grandma’s saying” comes from Myung Mi Kim, as quoted from *The ethics and poetics of alterity in Asian American Poetry* by Xiaojing Zhou. “The unnamed center exercises power,” comes from M.M.KIM as well. The separated sound “ĐÃ,” in “grávida,” in Vietnamese, is the same as “oo la la” in French.

The Thousand Islands

“The Thousand Islands” is an erasure of “A Thousand Islands of Summer” from *The National Geographic*. By Patrick J. Kelly; the erasure is found in the center column.

This poem is meant to be read by three people to create overlapping voices. The far left columns have been collaged from: “The Tosa Diary” by Ki no Tsurayuki, translated from the Japanese by Earl Roy Miner in *jubilat*; “Her Other Name” by Patricia Smith, from *Teahouse of the Almighty*; *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri. The far right

columns have been collaged from : *Famous Suicides of the Japanese Empire* by David Mura; “The Tosa Diary” by Ki no Tsurayuki, translated from the Japanese by Earl Roy Miner in *jubilat*; “Knocking” by Robert Walser; *The Heart of Buddhist Teaching*, Thich Nhat Hanh, as epigraph in Nick Flynn’s *Blind Hubber*; and “Origins and History of Consciousness” from *The Dream of a Common Language* by Adrienne Rich.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Anne Le is from the suburbs of Springfield, Virginia. She received her B.A. in English from George Mason University in 2007, and her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from George Mason University in 2011. Since 2008, Anne has worked at The Association of Writers and Writing Programs as the Conference Coordinator. One day, she will travel the shores of Viet Nam with nothing but a bag of poems.