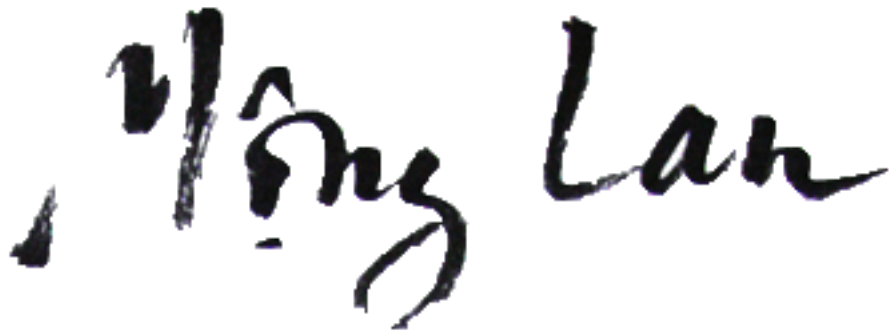


Poems:
“Proof”
“Love Poem to Tofu”
“Love Poem to Pho”
“A bird of laughing feathers”

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mong-Lan". The characters are fluid and cursive, with a small mark to the left of the first character.

Mong-Lan
Poet / Writer

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Abstract: A Vietnamese-born American poet and writer, I left Vietnam with my family one day before the evacuation of Saigon. These poems that follow, “Proof”; “Love Poem to Tofu”; “Love Poem to Pho”; and “A bird of laughing feathers” are explorations of self, identity, and society.

Key words: Mong-Lan, Vietnam, American poetry, Vietnamese-American poetry, love poems

Proof

in this city where you do not live
you were born
the city itself no longer exists on a map
of Vietnam
the street on which you were
born does not exist
for its name has changed
if you had continued
to exist here if you had stayed after war's end
now 30 yrs later you would be walking down the street talking
joking philosophizing suffering with friends
you would be a closed-eyed bicycle-motor-riding adult
married with children
the house where you lived the first five
years
of your life was seized
& therefore does not exist
as you knew it
it sits on a street whose name has changed
no longer recognizable
your grandparent's house
also appropriated
now people live there eating making love defecating
spinning new lives for themselves from the walls
of your past
in the city where you were born
you do not now exist because the city
no longer exists
the grandparents whom you met
in your imagination
& memory did exist
& gave birth to your parents
who exist in a different country & plane altogether
not in this city
of faint turquoise limestone whiteness & charcoal
of your imagination
two handfuls of cities

changed names through wars or revolutions

the hospital where you were born still remains

that exists & still keeps
its name Hospital of Saint Paul

does that prove anything?

Love Poem to Tofu

Everyday I open you up
with a knife slice you in half boil eat you

O how I need you warm creamy-white loaded with vegetable protein
how can I live
without your textured taste?
I don't even remember
when we first met: it must've been
in Saigon in a soup dish my mother made with tomatoes & a solitary
flaming egg
for many years I knew you made in California not
as good as in Vietnam but now in Tokyo you once
again become divine

you are exquisite plain dipped in soy sauce or *nuoc mam* with a bit
of lemon
& cayenne pepper

varieties of you I love silken firm braised
tofu I feast upon you

A bird of laughing feathers

A song gregarious

Concord to every cell & mitochondrion
to every person all bodies nations
neighbors sons daughters brothers &
sisters
of every skin color
to those who breathe those who
sleep
to those who kick & bother to dream
to those who dream & die dreaming

Armistice to those with knives guns & bombs

a nail a grenade on one's back cactus scorched
a board of thorns ashes
knocking knocking

to those who die
fighting
limbs burned off eyes torched
to those who are alive
fighting limbs bombed off heart beating

A century in the forest
meditating under a tree

Repose to those with mercurial hearts

ailing
Peace to nocturnal invasions
bodily invasions
to the seers the blind & decrepit

To the pallbearers
a flowing river of blossoms

NOTES

- [1] “Proof” is reprinted from *Love Poem to Tofu & Other Poems*, published by Valiant Press, 2007.
- [2] “Love Poem to Tofu” is reprinted from *Love Poem to Tofu & Other Poems*, published by Valiant Press, 2007.
- [3] “Love Poem to *Pho*” was originally published in the *North American Review*. *Pho* is Vietnam’s national soup, consisting of wide flat rice noodle, chicken or beef and its broth. Usually served with fresh vegetables such as lettuce, mints, chilies, etc.
- [4] “A bird of laughing feathers” was originally published in *Pleiades: A Journal of New Writing*.