

Dear editors

I would like to submit four poems for your special edition. They are:

The Prayer

House

The House in Hanoi

On the Track of the Yue

Here are some lines about my biography:

Born in Hanoi, Vietnam, Thuong Vuong-Riddick studied in French schools and later at the Sorbonne in Paris. She taught French in Vietnam, Paris, and Canada at the University of Montreal, McGill and University of Victoria, published articles about French, Quebec, and francophone literatures in French. In 1995 her bilingual book of poetry "Two Shores/Deux rives" was published, followed by "The Evergreen Country", a memoir about Vietnam, in 2007.

The mentioned poems are extracted from her second book of poetry, not published yet, "Seasons".

I send the three short poems first. The fourth will follow, I hope.

yours

Thuong Vuong-Riddick

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THE PRAYER

I said to myself:

“Maybe, I didn’t ask enough.”

I went to a local church knelt in front of a side altar

There, a mature woman completely prostrated herself
in an imploring of the whole self

I said, “I am not yet at this point.”

Later, I went travelling
to the evergreen country my heart sunk with sorrow on a trip to
the North

I prayed at the Perfumed Pagoda lost in fog
mystic river
we floated as if in a dream

I asked again
full light in a nunnery surrounded by gardens in the South

I repeated my prayer
in the Zen monastery recently built at Dalat
where the pines and conifers reminded me of the country where I
now live

I returned
forgot all about it

One day, a long time later, the answers came

THE HOUSE IN HANOI

On the street of Dragon's Jaw
a passerby recognizes me:

I have only been gone more than forty years!

In place of the house an immense building under construction:

No more house!

I was brought up with the verses
of my nanny, her prayer for the dead:

Vang bac, cua cai, De lai the giang money, possessions, and jewels
are to be left

on earth

We visit with neighbours who stayed while we left:

One day, those who travel the world
will come back to their point of departure

Co Lin, friend of my girlhood taken in a photograph the year we
left Hanoi:

she stands erect in front of my window I, a teenager, appear at
her call

My husband takes a new photograph: elated, Co Lin and I

HOUSES

I have lived in many houses along my roaming life
but strange, in my dreams, when I dream of Father

I see him in the house of Hanoi.

Yesterday we gave a reception I was very tired after, and slept

I dreamt I bled abundantly hid myself
in my room
nobody knew

even my doctor sister
passed the locked door
finally my sister from Vancouver came into the room
saw me
shouted

but then I was running
to the yard of the house in Hanoi

I prostrated myself on the soil, saying:

“They told me my father is dead, they are going to bring him to
me.”

ON THE TRACK OF THE YUE

In memory of Anne Hebert
For her *Tombeau des Rois*

I am a daughter of the Yue.

I was going to the graves of the Kings of Yue
followed their track in mainland China
searching origins past Vietnam.
took the bus for Quang Zhou
to the grave of the last king Yue, Zhao Wei,
Cantonese general—
his name written in the history of Vietnam.

I was going to my Ancestors' graves
flew to Xiamen, my family's place of origin.
Xiamen, my ancestors left here
more than a century ago
for Annam, *the peaceful south*.

At the airport, babbled in Fujanese
--the dialect of my parents--
with a woman
who decided to take me
under her wing--
but we became separated.

My neighbour, a doctor
told me *You shouldn't go by yourself in China*.
He, too, decided to take me
under his wing
gave me his telephone numbers--
in the hospital, at home--
in case of emergency.

At our arrival he looked everywhere
for the guide, until he discovered her
completely lost: she couldn't find
anyone who looks like my name
in the Canadian passport.

I found mountains
land and sea
green everywhere

a ferry in front
of a small island.

My own past slid by
the taxi windows—
Buddhist Temple,
the University of Xiamen,
parks where old people gather for exercises
play games, talk.

Once inside the hotel room
I heard a knock at my door
in my surprise I asked in Mandarin:
“Who is it?”

Somebody said something
I couldn't understand
I told her, “I don't know you,
I won't open the door.”
I have been told
not to open the door by my guide.

I took a bath, went to sleep
to my horror I heard a noise—
the door opened!

A maid brought in
a basket of fruit, and a kimono
with a card: compliments from the hotel
“For you, welcome back.”

In the hotel, friendly people
spoke with the voice of my uncle.
I could share intimate conversation
with my guide.

In the restaurant where I sat
all by myself
The waitress spoke only Mandarin
came from another town--
for an hour she spoke with me.

For three days I was in paradise
took the ferry and visited Guland Islet
where my aunt had dreamed
of having a permanent house
for our big family
who had been wandering
a century, without one.

I felt I had known this place

a very long time
could picture my mother
uncles and aunts
in that serene landscape.

I was going to the graves of the Kings Yue
I took the flight to Nanning
the Provincial Museum,
gigantic drum
symbol of a whole civilization
so many frogs
symbol of power
of fertility
and so many fabulous animals
haunting our oldest mythologies.

A Vietnamese verse
of my childhood
came to my lips--

Con coc la cau ong troi
Ai ma danh noi
Thi troi danh cho

*Frogs are Heaven's uncles
whoever strikes them
heaven will strike him.*

Multiple ethnic strands of China
one with dwellings
similar to that
very old house that
Vietnamese display
as their typical old house
in Hue, central Vietnam.

I spoke with another Chinese on the plane
he helped me with my luggage all the way
and told me in Mandarin:

“You could tell me
you come from
this country
and that one
but you are always from here.”

I stopped in Hangzkou
my young guide had read Amy Tan
knew Celine Dion
took me to a silk factory.

I bought a silk set
for my mother
who has never been in China
though in every town
she visited
she went to Chinatown.

I was going to the heart of the Kings of Yue.
Travelling to Shaoxing
two young maidens
coming home offered me their help.
I received help from the inspector
recommended by my guide.

The train stopped.
Two other young students
freshly graduated from university
jumped in to take my luggage.

One of the guides
took me to Fushan Park
to the grave of the first King Yue
with bronze frescos
describing King Yue's life—

His ordeal as a slave
at the hands of his enemy
the liver he kept
to remember bitterness
the wine he used
to pour into the river
to give the people strength.

I saw the picture
of the location of his grave
very different
from any emperor of China.

I was elated to find out
I could survive in Mandarin
everywhere--

I was helped by Chinese
was recognized
as of one of their own.

I watched television
for other glimpses
of life in China, heard the song:

*Walking on the road
we sing a song
celebrating the fish
and the birds*

*we sing a song
for sheep and cattle
outnumbering the stars
in the sky.*