

From 36 WAYS OF WRITING A
VIETNAMESE POEM

Nam Le

[37. Post-racial / -glacial]

If I must be something
let me be outwash plain
lowland
past glacier's margin, glacier's edge
thaw and drift convene
breathtaking arguments of light
over me
where what matter was argued
has long evaporated

Let what's left be
left on me
spill spoil residue
sweat & naked chill
once passion has dragged
over —
Let me have been loomed
over overwhelmed
and left and still

Here where the perfect thing's
been and gone away
let me stay
I will accept anything
You
know that I know
my place silt, sand, gravel, clastics,
clay — I am an open mouth
for Your waste

Glad I am O Lord Glacier
of Your leavings
fast-hold sediments scoria
sequences of laminae
all that long-held deep-time till
moved by Your own weight
You lay Your burden down instead
in slow flow / thro
on rhythmite beds

I can be where You forget
Your reason unlearn Your compaction
of snow (which is breath) to firm
ice (which is rock) —
there is order beneath Your face
of frozen rock —
I can be entropy mine the cross-
reasons counter-actions the erring
(dis)orders of erosion

Well come all
and by any transport
out of irresistible
increase to slack stark
space
out of symmetry to splayed mess
take the air take the light see
the outer spread-out stars
and by any process

Melt and calve basal lodge
 phasal sublimation
how could You who accumulate
 but to ablate
apprehend all my forms of loss?
 Stands of verglassed breccia
 glisten like viscera
Dead-ice in disintegration
 moraines maimed kames eskers

All the forms of collapse
 present fluvial surficial
 pock and pit
 snowmelt sprawls the sediment flats
 like dazzling lines of errata
 See: if You let me
I will be a field of deposition
 with things in it
for You for (un)sorting for strata

No that silver thaw
 is sclera
 and the glacier (come to think)
 one glaucomatose blue eye
 rebuffering every wave of light
 its blue shy inlit paling —
 like an error of sky exposure —
 ghosting the iris as if
 arrested by murder

Let what's pure be
 perturbed in me blue
 gone keen in nervy brightness
 imprised by black brown
 coils my ice-keeps ice-hoards
 salted loess yellow
 my distal drainages scored
 tea green by rock flour ground
 steeped at the wastage zone

Not what turns away light to see
but takes it in too washes its feet
changes
(its sheets) for it if You are eye
let me be aperture the clear
all-accommodating blink
that takes in flow retreat thaw
refreezing all of it all here
and – too – what all of it's for

Nothing escapes me
I am the escape
the vast secular sweep where nothing
need mean more than itself
(let) light form land form liquid
life itself labile microbial
seethe grouse & auk I am (let me be)
because You left (now leave) and what's left's
work and more than enough