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Blooming Lotus

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Blooming Lotus
2015

BY

Brian Nguyen

Marine Science

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Table of Contents

ABC	1
Farewell Vietnam.....	2
Aokigahara.....	3
An End to the Beginning.....	5
Real Lies	6
Realize.....	7
The River	8
Abandoned	9
Unmarried	10
The Flower and Willow World.....	11
Thread by Thread.....	13
Aubade	15
Songbird.....	16
Nelumbo Nucifera.....	18

ABC

“American-born Chinese,” my title since
Birth. I questioned where was home; even in
China I was an ABC. My background
Defined who I was to others, here and there.

Everyone in the United States has
Freedom in this one nation under
God, right? Yet I have often faced
Humiliation because of my own heritage.

I remember walking down the halls hearing
Jokes whispered among students about my
Kind. They pointed out my slanted
Little eyes and said that I was
“Made in China.”

Not all Asians are Chinese. My fellow
Oriental friends and I were often
Pestered by open-mouth fools
Questioning our race, asking us,
“Are you Asian or Chinese?” I was

Stereotyped by not only students but even my
Teachers. They believed all Asians
Universally excelled in math. I was faced with many
Variables that only I could solve. I'd walk up,
Write the answer on the board, and sit back down.

Xenophobics stare at my chinky eyes and
Yellow skin. Where can we find
Zen under such a gaze?

Farewell Vietnam

If they never entered into my homeland of Vietnam,
I wouldn't have abandoned my country, leaving behind my beloved Vietnam.

The soldiers easily occupied my village, comprised only of tiny huts floored with brown,
dry dirt. When one crossed the line, my parents decided we would leave Vietnam.

One day, my sister returned home, face tearstained, reeking of musk in her soiled gown.
At the time, I didn't understand why my sobbing mom was so persistent on leaving Vietnam.

My mom woke up my siblings and me on a stormy night. *Mẹ* bent down
next to our shared bed of piled hay, softly shook us awake, and told us to pray before we left Vietnam.

We quietly snuck out of our home, into the jungle and out of the soldier-infested town,
not that those damn *cộng sản* weren't crawling about every inch of Vietnam.

My father guided us through the forest of bamboo, leading us down
an obscure path. Other families were also trekking through the humid *rừng* to escape Vietnam.

In the distance I heard a baby cry, triggering a storm of bullets to rain down
upon us all. Bloodcurdling screams rang throughout Vietnam.

The yellow bastards were getting closer. I saw a little boy, rice fields away from me, shot down.
All I remember was running and running until we finally reached the docks of Vietnam.

I'll never forget being on the boat, looking up at my father, a slight frown
on my *bố's* face as he gazed back at Vietnam.

Other than that night, I can't recall a time when I saw *Bố* looking so broken down.
I couldn't tell whether tears or raindrops trickled down his face as we said farewell to our Vietnam.

Aokigahara

The yūrei roam about the sea of trees,
gazing at the mother on her son's back
as they recall their familiar past lives.
The mother hugs her arms tightly around
her son's shoulders, thighs in his shaky hands
as he trudges deep into the forest
of Mount Fuji before retreating back
home alone. Forgetting the long way back,
the man stumbles through the forest until
he hears a stick crack. His weary eyes drift
down towards his swollen feet to see a trail
of broken twigs ahead of him. The man
weeps as he drags his feet along the trail
that directs him back to his empty home.

She drags her feet out of school, letting them
guide her towards the forest rather than home,
hanging her head, eyes staring at the gray
sidewalk as she recalls the posted grades
in the hallway, her name under the top
score. She throws the noose over the thick branch,
and ties the other end to a tree root
before kicking the stack of sticks away.

The ex-salaryman takes the basket
filled with random medicines to the cash
register. He hands over the money
earned from the many long hours he put
in overtime, from the skipped holidays,
and from all the days he came in coughing.
He pours bottle after bottle of pills
down his throat, sitting on the ground, his back
resting against a tree as he listens
to the heavy silence, his eyes gazing
at the emptiness till his senses stop.

The volunteer strolls past the wooden sign

that encourages the troubled to turn
away and seek aid. While he searches
for the bodies of the deceased, the man
wanders underneath the draped ropes
that ornament branches, like dull garlands,
and walks along the unmarked trail, kicking
the empty container that meets his foot
as he explores the thick forest. Although
the thick tree branches block all wind, the man
feels a chill as he wanders warily
underneath the shadows of the tall trees
as rays of light struggle to penetrate
into the silent and empty forest.

An End to the Beginning

Began with one, a man,
with a wife, a child, a family,
with a life,
with a home,
with a hut in a village,
with neighboring friends,
with children running outside, playing,
with growing rice fields,
with an ocean of fish,
with boats full of fisherman,
with fishing poles.

War.

Ended with machine guns,
with boats full of immigrants,
with an ocean of blood,
with dying rice fields,
with children running away, crying,
with faraway friends,
with soldiers in a village,
with no home,
with no life,
with no family, no child, no wife,
with no man, no one.

Real Lies

Your eyes
are small in size,
chinky, shaped like almonds.
Our classmates ask me why I'm friends
with you, why I'm friends with the chink. I say,
We're not friends. I'm not friends with the chink. Everyday
I ask for your notes since you have the best class grade. We hate
that you break the curve but I'll be your "friend" and it'll be great
for me. I'll be your friend and keep playing the part.
I'll take the chink's notes. He's not all that smart.
I'll use them and we'll both get A's;
I can't wait for that day.
I like this end,
my friend.

Realize

My eyes
are small in size,
chinky, shaped like almonds.
I know you don't call me a friend.
I know what you tell our classmates behind
my back. My eyes can see straight through you, I'm not blind.
*We're not friends. I'm not friends with the chink. It's all just a game
for his notes.* Pretend all you want and I will do the same.
Study my "notes." We'll see who's the one being played.
I can't wait until you look at your grade
on the next exam. I'll laugh when
your eyes start to widen.
Go and try me.
You'll see.

The River

I went down to the river to pray
searching for enlightenment
to show me the way
back onto the right path.

I searched for enlightenment,
stumbling through the signs and sins
and off the eightfold path.
I studied about the good way

and by stumbling through the sins
I began to end my mental suffering.
I continued studying about the good way
to find enlightenment

and when I ended all my suffering,
it showed me the way
to my enlightenment
as I went down in the river to pray.

Abandoned

My mother never said much about my father,
only that she left Vietnam without my father.

She wouldn't tell me why he chose not to flee
with her, leaving me with no one to call my father.

Although I kept asking my mother to tell me
more about him, she'd say nothing of my father.

I asked my grandma about him and she
shared the only story regarding my father.

Beneath him, my mother fought back but her plea
and tears were ignored by my father.

My mother, a decade and a half older than me,
nurtured me alone after the one act of my father.

When I learned what he had done, I abandoned any
desire I had about the man with the title "my father."

Unmarried

Two moons gazed at each other from the pond
and the starry sky, shining through the thick
darkness that cloaked the crickets wandering
on Earth's scalp, hidden within strands of grass,
their presence known by the constant chirping,
like the sound of screwing lightbulbs, chirping
as if they opposed the glowing pair, clouds
veiling above. Cracked church bells rang from frogs'
throats hushing the cheering crickets that hopped
away. A frog leaped into the old pond
and rings of moss-colored water rippled
the white face away, the sound of water,
the soft cry of the distance moon above.

The Flower and Willow World

She stared at her reflection.

A façade laid upon her face,
thick and white, like the snow
that concealed the ground
outside the okiya, charcoal
lining her petite eyes
and darkening her brows,
and lips painted a deep red,
a rose bud lusting to bloom.

She stared at her reflection,

looking past the façade
and deep into her dark eyes,
seeing her father handed money
from the man who held onto
her tiny hand. As she was led
away, she looked back,
looked past her father
standing at the door of her home,
house made with boards of wood,
rotting away, and saw her mother
covering her face with her frail hands,
tears seeping between her fingers,
weeping like a willow.

She stared at her reflection

and picked up the hair pin
resting on the vanity,
pierced it through the thick bun
rooted to the back of her head.
Tiny ceramic flowers
stacked on one another
dangled from the pin,
hanging like the leaves

drooping from a willow tree.
It was the final touch
to her garb as it mimicked
the cherry blossoms
woven into her silk robe.

She stared at her reflection

and saw a flower,
a pretty little flower,
delicate with beauty and grace,
with strong roots that grew through
dirt, the filthy dirt that nurtured
her to blossom, like a lotus
rooted in a swamp, its bud rising
through muddy waters, hovering above
before blooming. Men adored her
for her beauty and her scent.
She fed them her fruits,
fed their souls, their lust.
Petals reached out when she
fully bloomed, attracting
everyone who walked by her.

She stared at her reflection

and what she saw was the power
of a pretty little flower.

Thread by Thread

Gandhi, 1921

Fibers drag through his fingertips threading yarn from the raw cotton held in his hand. The hands labor peacefully, one turning the charkha round and round, and the other pulling yarn away from the spindle's tip as it lengthens. His arm slowly extends up, keeping the line taut as the yarn grows. When he stops rotating the wheel, the rounds of gunfire remain, high-pitched voices breaking, like shattering glass, as men run away from the British, not fighting back.

He spins the wheel in reverse, lowering his arm as the long yarn winds and bundles around the spindle, coming together like all the Indians who have joined him in his long protest. He spins the charkha again, creating more coarse thread to make his own clothing, and carefully raises a frail arm, thin from fasting, as the yarn draws out from the tip. He stretches the arm slowly, preventing the delicate line from breaking, pulling up with little strength.

The spinning wheel turns round and round, the wood rotating with a humming creak, threading through the air to open ears, his speeches heard all over India. The yarn grows longer and longer, long like the cold bars, longer than the time spent meditating behind those rusted iron rods, the touch of his palms wrapped around the thin metal poles no less familiar than the feeling of his hands turning the wheel round and round. The spindle of thread thickens and thickens into a tangled and twisted mess, like

Songbird

There's a songbird in a golden cage
that wants to get out
so he sings a song,
Let me free. Let me free.

But she doesn't
and keeps him locked
up.

There's a songbird in a dream
that flies,
crashing into the golden bars,
falls,
crying his song
so weak that no one can hear,
not the whores nor the bartenders,
not the merchants,
his voice fading
away,
no one ever knowing
he's
in there.

There's a songbird in a golden cage
that wants to get out
so he sings a song,
Let me free.

He sits
on his golden perch swing,
looking out between
the golden bars
at the tree branches,
leaves extending
above,
the clouds streaming
through the blue sky
washing away his
sadness.

There's a songbird in a golden cage

that wants to get out,
so he sings a song,

Let me free.

She hears his cry,

opens

the cage

and lets him

free.

He

flies.

Nelumbo nucifera

Murky rings ripple
from mud droplets, white petals
blooming high above.

Brian Nguyen

Professor Christine Rockey

HONR 499 H1

15 April 2015

Reflective Essay

While reflecting on my poetry chapbook, *Blooming Lotus*, I ask myself what I was trying to accomplish by creating the chapbook. I have always been interested in my East Asian culture, but growing up as an Asian American has resulted in some ignorance in regards to the topic. I wanted to explore more of my own heritage through the creation of this chapbook by writing poems inspired by East Asian culture. Not only did I want to expose myself to East Asian culture but I also wanted to expose my readers to it as well. Most of my poems required research, which mostly was through the internet but I was able to reach out to my parents and relatives to share their personal stories with me. I enjoyed being able to learn about my family's background as they were immigrants during the Vietnam War and enjoyed being able to hear all the stories that have been passed down from generations. I feel that I was able to learn more about my culture through this chapbook and able to portray it to others as well through my writing.

I know that I have grown as a writer of poetry through the creation of this chapbook. I look back to when I first started writing poetry in my Introduction to Creative Writing course with Professor Joe Oestreich. The first section we covered in the class was poetry and the students were required to create a five-poem portfolio. One of the poems within the portfolio had to be written in formal verse, which I selected to write a ghazal, a form we learned about in class.

My ghazal, "Farewell Vietnam," was the last poem I wrote for my portfolio since I was avoiding writing the formal verse poem. When I was writing my ghazal, I honestly dreaded it. Later, I shared my ghazal with my class and Professor Oestreich insisted that I submit it in the Paul Rice Poetry Broadside Series contest, so I submitted it just to submit it. To my surprise, I got a phone call from Dr. Dan Albergotti telling me that my poem was selected as the winning poem to be published. From there, I decided to try the whole poetry thing out and went on to take another creative writing course focused on poetry taught by Dr. Albergotti and I really began to enjoy poetry. I decided to do my honors thesis on poetry and asked Dr. Albergotti to become my advisor for my thesis and here I am writing this reflection essay for it.

I remember the poems I wrote for my past poetry courses and I cringe and laugh at them. Working with Dr. Albergotti and writing frequently has really helped me to grow as a writer. It sounds really simple but just writing helped me to become a better writer. Along with my frequent writing assisted by Dr. Albergotti, I started to read more poetry and I attended the poetry readings on campus. Reading and listening to poetry also helped me in the creation of my chapbook. Some of my poems included within the chapbook reflect ideas from other writers and I think by trying to put myself into their mindsets, it helped me to figure out my own writing style.

I used to be so focused on formal verse as I hated the freedom with free verse and wanted to be bound by rules as I grew up liking rules. I felt like formal rules helped me in the creation of a poem but Dr. Albergotti suggested that I not limit myself and to explore free verse. I began writing in free verse and it was a struggle for me at first but with the guidance of Dr. Albergotti, I ended up writing half the chapbook in free verse. I feel that free verse comes more naturally to me than when I first started the chapbook and I personally enjoy it. I think writing in free verse

helps me when I write in formal verse now. The formal verse poems I wrote when I was finishing up my chapbook came out initially strong and I did not need any major edits unlike my earlier formal verse poems, which may have been due to writing in free verse more frequently than I used to.

“ABC,” the opening poem of my chapbook, is written in the abecedarian form, fitting with its title. The poem was one of the earlier poems I wrote but I let the document sit on my computer for a long time before returning to it. I think after writing other poems, mainly free verse poems, it made it easier for me to complete this poem when I came back to it. The earlier drafts of the poem were a constant struggle as I returned week to week to Dr. Albergotti’s office and still did not come up with a poem that I felt was strong. I almost gave up on this poem but as I was trying to finish up my chapbook, I decided to come back to this poem because I felt that there was something within the poem that needed to be said and I couldn’t just leave this poem out of my chapbook. I was also encouraged to finish this poem when I received a rejection e-mail from the Archarios. I submitted an earlier draft of the poem to the Archarios, which got rejected, along with four other poems and the e-mail mentioned that “ABC” was one of the poems within my batch of submissions that was really enjoyable to read. I thought maybe there was something in the poem that others saw that I didn’t see, even though I was the one who wrote it.

I remember reading a post my Chinese American friend put on Facebook after she returned from her summer trip to China. Her post discussed how she was disgusted that her own people didn’t even consider her one of their own and called her an “ABC,” an American-born Chinese, and judged her for it. I felt a connection to her post in that although my heritage is Vietnamese, I feel more American than I am Vietnamese. Her post was the first time I heard of the term “ABC” and I was intrigued by it. In writing on the topic, my first drafts were more

telling than showing. I worked to make the poem more personal by depicting different scenes and by revealing more typical stereotypes for Asians. I kept getting more specific and detailed from draft to draft to make the poem speak to the reader. In trying to end the poem, I was not really sure how to end it, which occurred for many of my poems. I think leaving the poem with a question help to set up the rest of the chapbook.

“Farewell Vietnam” was inspired by a story told by one of my aunts when she was escaping Vietnam. An image always stuck in my mind when she recalled the event when she saw her best friend being shot by a soldier as people were running to the docks to escape. My aunt had to keep running and couldn’t do anything to help her best friend. The poem was initially one I hated writing and I thought it wasn’t good. I was told otherwise during my peer review during my Introduction to Creative Writing course. I consider “Farewell Vietnam” to be the poem that started my poetic journey for me.

When deciding on the repeating phrase for my ghazal, I decided to end my ghazal like Natasha Trethewey’s ghazal “Miscegenation,” with a specific place. One of the parts I struggled with was the rhyme within the ghazal and I learned that there are not many words that rhyme with the –own ending. I probably should have tried to change the rhyme but I tried to force it and to work it. In the end, the rhyme ended up working somewhat. It wasn’t until Dr. Albergotti’s poetry course that I realized how the English language is poor in rhymes and that I could be a little less strict with rhymes by using slant rhymes. I think if I knew about slant rhymes when I was writing the poem, it would probably be much different than the current draft as I could have used words ending with –ound. It is hard to make major changes to this poem because of my emotional attachment to it but I think it is something I want to do someday. My focus would be

to make the lines shorter because I don't think the current version would be able to fit on a book page as I already have to lower the font size for the poem.

"Aokigahara" was a poem I wrote for Dr. Albergotti's class for an assignment. It started off in formal verse and was much shorter than the current draft, which is written in free verse. The inspiration for this poem was from a folklore I learned of in regards to the forest. There was a boy who carried his mother up a mountain on his back before leaving her up there to die. He was lost while trying to return home until he found a trail of broken twigs his mother left behind when she was breaking them off of the trees they passed on the way up the mountain. I learned of this story from a poem I read and learned about an old Japanese custom where an elderly relative would be taken to some remote place and left there to die. The law demanded the custom, called "ubasute," to be practiced because at the time, there was not enough food to feed everyone and by getting rid of the old, there would be less people to feed. The old were considered to have already lived their lives and would be the closest to passing away in the future.

I researched the forest and learned how it was known as the Suicide Forest. In the current draft, I depicted the story of the boy and his mother, scenes of suicide, and a search and rescue scene. I did quite a bit of research for this poem and tried to use specific details that actually reflected the real forest, such as the signs placed near the forest and the empty and stillness of the forest. As this poem was originally a poem for Dr. Albergotti's class, he suggested me to write a draft of the poem in free verse. This poem was my first actual attempt at a free verse poem and Dr. Albergotti gave me lots of advice. He told me to try something he does, which is to write each line with ten syllables, something he often does in his free verse poems. It helped me quite a bit as I was still attached to formal verse at the time so the syllabic count allowed me to be free

with a little bit of restraint. After writing "Aokigahara," I continued using Dr. Albergotti's method in using ten syllables in each line for several of my free verse poems.

One free verse poem in my chapbook that I did not use ten syllables in each line was "An End to the Beginning." The poem was inspired by two poems: Dr. Albergotti's pantoum, "No Beginning," and a poem (the name I cannot remember) I read in Dr. Albergotti's class written by former classmate Nick Turzi. The style and form of "An End to the Beginning" is similar to the form in Turzi's poem, where the first stanza contained single words or short phrases followed by the one-line second stanza that referred to an event that caused a disaster. The disaster was depicted in the final stanza, which was a palindrome of the first stanza but with negative connotations. I thought of the palindrome-like poem Turzi wrote when I read "No Beginning" and decided to write another poem about the Vietnam War and titled it to a similar line in Dr. Albergotti's poem. One of the reasons why Turzi's poem was memorable was because he was able to create strong imagery with few words, which I attempted to do the same. In deciding on the few words I was going to use for my poem, I knew that they had to be specific nouns that related to the Vietnam and the war.

The next two poems in my chapbook are "Real Lies" and "Realize," which were inspired by one of Dr. Albergotti's idea. I was trying to finish up my chapbook and asked if Dr. Albergotti had any ideas for topics as I was not able to find any inspiration or topics to write on at the time. As I recently finished "ABC" before asking him for ideas, the term "chink" was on his mind. He gave me the idea to take his form, the Albergonnet, and to write about the term "chink." The Albergonnet ends up in a triangular form so he suggested that I write one of the two poems aligned to the right side of the page and the other aligned to the left side of the page. When the two poems would meet in the middle of a book, they would form the shape of a thin

eye. The titles of the poems are similar and sound the same because I wanted the reader to be aware that the poems go together.

I wanted the two poems to be cohesive and decided to play on the theme of eyes by showing two poems with two different perspectives. The story within the poems manifested on its own as it wasn't planned whatsoever. I usually have an idea of what I am planning to write when I write one of my poems, but all I knew was that I wanted to write about chinky eyes. I had lots of trouble writing this poem as I tried to write one before the other and kept going back and forth trying to complete one of them so I could respond with the other poem. I had multiple drafts I kept deleting and I started over many times but eventually I started to write the poems together line by line. When I worked line by line with both poems at the same time, the poems started to form. I had trouble with the rhyme scheme at times but I think my use of slant rhymes worked well to help me with that obstacle. I think the story that came out is a bit humorous and maybe a little satirical as the term "chink" could be taken in a derogative manner. I think the poems are placed in a good spot for a bit of comic relief as the first few poems in my chapbook are more serious and talk about death frequently. I also had to consider where I placed these two poems so that they would line up with "Real Lies" on the left page and "Realize" on the right page of a book so the chinky eye shape would be made within an actual book. As much as I struggled with the poems, I was surprised when Dr. Albergotti didn't find any issues with the poems as I was worried about them before I met with him.

"The River" was an earlier poem I wrote in the pantoum form. I had this idea for a while to write about a poem based on the river in Herman Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* and to mesh it with the southern hymn sung "Down to the River to Pray," which was sung during the times of slavery. The hymn "Down to the River to Pray" is one of my favorite traditional hymns along

with *Siddhartha* being one of the books I enjoyed reading. As a boy living in the South and one that is Buddhist, I wanted to try to combine these two ideas together into a poem. I had the topic for the poem written down in a note application on my cell phone and one day the urge came to me to actually put the poem down in words after randomly checking my note app one day. I thought the pantoum would be a good form to show how *Siddhartha* always returned to the river as the pantoum uses repetition of lines.

“Abandoned” was another poem I wrote earlier on and it was inspired by a story my father told me. He told me about one of his American friends who went to Vietnam during the war. His friend recently found out that he had a daughter in Vietnam who was over twenty years of age that he never knew about. The girl was conceived by a random Vietnamese girl who my father’s friend engaged in intercourse with. When my father told me the story, I wondered how the daughter felt throughout her life without a father figure. I put myself in her shoes while writing the ghazal. I thought the ghazal would work well as the speaker longed for her father, which is shown by the constant repetition of him. One thing I learned about in writing poetry from this poem was the degree of ambiguity. I was really ambiguous in earlier drafts of this poem with the rape scene but I think I made it less ambiguous than before, though I still consider it to be ambiguous enough for readers to possibly miss. I like to play around with the level of ambiguity now with my other poems; however, I personally do not want to make my readers work too hard to understand my poems. “Abandoned” followed “The River” as both poems contained the idea of searching for something, in “Abandoned,” a father, and in “The River,” enlightenment.

“Unmarried” was the last poem I wrote for my chapbook. I wrote the poem with ten syllables per line like I did with “Aokigahara.” Dr. Albergotti gave me the idea to find

inspiration for another poem from a form of art. The first thing that came to my mind when thinking about a form of art was the famous haiku about the old pond by Basho. Like “Real Lies” and “Realize,” which were the two poems written before “Unmarried,” the story of the poem grew on its own. I thought about imagery when writing this poem, especially visual and auditory imagery. I focused on auditory imagery when writing the poem, which was something I didn’t really consider much in my other poems. I was also inspired by Amy Lowell poem “The Pond,” which uses auditory imagery very well. I combined Lowell’s pond poem with Basho’s poem to create my own. I first started thinking about the setting surrounding the frog and the pond since I knew those two images would eventually have to come up in my poem. I thought about the setting being at nighttime with the moon shining above and once I started the poem with the image of the moon, the moon became the subject for the poem over the pond and the frog. I used different animals that would typically appear in a nighttime pond setting and they ended up playing the role of people at a wedding. With the animals I used, I wanted to describe the sound they make in an odd way, that still made sense to the readers, who I assume would know what a cricket’s chirping and a frog’s croak would sound like. I played around with the way Lowell described the sound of a frog’s croak in “The Pond” and put a twist on it by making them church bells. The only changes I made from the original draft to this draft of the poem were two words in the last line that were more telling than showing. “Unmarried” was placed in the chapbook after “Abandoned” because it went along with the idea of a single, unmarried woman.

The next poem goes along with the white face image from “Unmarried”, except the white-faced woman in the next poem is a geisha. I knew I wanted to include a poem about a geisha somewhere in my chapbook as they have always interested me. I was researching about geishas and there was a Japanese term that related to geishas and translated as “the flower and

willow world.” I decided to use the phrase as the title for the poem and to use the plants within the title as metaphors to describe my geisha and her life throughout the poem. I wrote the poem in free verse again but rather than worrying about the syllabic count, I worried more about the ending word for each line.

I was inspired by *Memoirs of a Geisha*, by Arthur Golden, which I partially read and also inspired by the film adaption of the novel. I remember a scene in the movie where the main character was staring at herself in a mirror putting her make up on and finishing her look by placing a pin in her hair that had cherry blossoms hanging from it. The fourth stanza was inspired by a scene from the novel when the main character was sold and taken away from her family. Her parents sold her for money and the main character was taken to the geisha house to learn how to become a geisha. The eighth stanza used a metaphor of a flower to describe the geisha in the poem, in which I referred to the geisha as a lotus flower. I remember watching a show that talked about how flowers are underestimated and it inspired the final stanzas of the poem.

“Thread by Thread” is a free verse poem with the ten syllable count per line and the poem has historical reference to Gandhi’s protest against Britain. I remember learning about Gandhi in my history class in high school and I watched the 1982 film *Gandhi*, which depicted his life. The charkha played a major role in Gandhi’s protest as he encouraged Indian’s to weave their own textiles rather than buying imported goods from Britain. I wanted to use the spinning wheel as a metaphor to Gandhi’s protest throughout the poem. There were major images I wanted to illustrate, such as Gandhi behind bars, the Salt March, the religious riots, his fasting, his speeches, meditation, and the violence versus non-violent protest. I think the image of creating thread and the image of the rotating wheel worked well as metaphors to describe Gandhi’s protest.

I followed "Thread by Thread" with "Aubade" as it also had historical context. I wanted to write "Aubade" as I was inspired by Dr. Albergotti's poem "Aubade" he read during a poetry reading on campus. Before he read the poem, he talked about what an aubade was, which he said was a poem that was usually about lover separating at dawn or when the sun is just rising. I thought about the image of the rising sun and when I was thinking about the rising sun, it made me think of Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun. I knew I wanted to write a poem about the atomic bombings in Japan so I decided to combine that topic with an aubade. I decide to attempt a sonnet as it was a form I never written in before. I used some slant rhymes and a little bit of meter variation to the traditional iambic pentameter used within the poem. I researched a bit about the bombings and decided to write about the Hiroshima bombing as I was already writing another poem (which I did not include within my chapbook) about Fat Man, the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki. I also decided to write about Little Boy since it was dropped closer to the time of sunrise than when the time Fat Man was dropped. I chose to write in the perspective of the person who dropped Little Boy on Hiroshima because I thought it would a different way to look at the horrific event. I wanted to use not only the literal sunrise but also the explosion of the atomic bomb to represent the rising sun in the aubade.

I followed "Aubade" with "Songbird" as they both ended in similar manners, with the act of flying away. "Songbird" was similar to "The River" in that I wanted to combine an image from *Siddhartha* with another piece of work, in this case the poem "Bluebird" by Charles Bukowski. I wanted to emulate Bukowski's form as his approach to free verse was very different to the approach I was taking for my own free verse poems. In *Siddhartha*, there is a songbird that is locked away in a golden cage and I used that image in place of the bluebird locked away in the speaker's heart in "Bluebird." Bukowski's free verse was very different for me and even after

writing a poem similar to his style, I am not sure if I completely understand his writing style, though it did teach me about different aspects of free verse, such as the importance of enjambment. There were specific images in *Siddhartha* that I wanted to depict in the poem while still keeping structural elements and content from “Bluebird” within “Songbird.” “Songbird” ends similar to “Bluebird” in that the birds are let out of the cage at the end of the poems. I wanted to show the metaphor and parallelism of the songbird to Siddhartha in my poem like it is done within the novel *Siddhartha*. I feel that this poem is not one all readers will understand, especially if they have never read *Siddhartha* but I still think the poem is strong and can be interpreted in a different way without the *Siddhartha* allusion.

The closing poem for my chapbook is “*Nelumbo nucifera*,” which is the scientific name for the lotus flower. I wanted to write one poem in the traditional Asian form, the haiku, though the version I wrote in is technically the English haiku. I think the form is fitting for my chapbook as an Asian American since the English haiku is similar to me in a sense. I also think it was fitting to end to chapbook with a form that was traditionally Asian since my chapbook is themed around East Asian culture. I also thought it was suitable to end the chapbook on “*Nelumbo nucifera*” because the chapbook started with an English form, the abecedarian. “*Nelumbo nucifera*” was also placed after “Songbird” since the ending images were similar with the image of the songbird flying away and with the image of the lotus rising above. The title of the chapbook, “Blooming Lotus”, also came from this poem, which is also referred to in “The Flower and Willow World.”

The poem was meant to depict the growth of a lotus flower. In East Asian culture, the lotus flower is symbolic to show how good can come out of something bad, which can also be interpreted as one is able to rise from sin. I used a lot of alliteration, assonance, and consonance

to make the haiku a bit more complex and compelling. I feel that the poem speaks for my entire chapbook in that I have several poems that contain darker, serious topics but I try to bring light and beauty to them by exposing the topics through poetry. While I wanted to expose my readers to East Asian culture, I wanted to do so in a manner that would educate them in an unbiased manner as some of my poem topics are topics with opposing sides and opinions. I think by using poetry to reveal the topics allow the aesthetic quality of poetry to cover up any prejudice.

My chapbook was enjoyable to create and I learned more than I expected over the semesters I've worked on it. I feel more confident in my poetry than I did in the past and I am glad I was given to opportunity to explore poetry even though I am a marine science major. As I reflect back on my chapbook, I want to acknowledge several people who have helped me somewhere along the way in regards to the completion of my chapbook. I want to give a big thanks to Dr. Tripti Pillai, who taught my Literature and Culture course. I have to thank her because she was the reason I minored in English because her course was so enjoyable and educational. I have to also thank Professor Joe Oestreich for pushing me to submit "Farewell Vietnam" into the Paul Rice Poetry Broadside Series contest because that winning poem was the reason I decided to further pursue poetry. I also want to thank both Donna Mitchell and Sherrill Allen for teaching me English in high school and for always pushing me in my English career. I want to thank Professor Christine Rockey for guiding me along the whole way in the completion of my senior thesis by always checking in on me and by always being on hand to assist me when needed. My biggest thanks goes to Dr. Dan Albergotti who taught my Reading and Writing Poetry course and who agreed to be my thesis advisor. If Dr. Albergotti didn't agree to be my advisor, my chapbook would not exist as I would have refused to have any other faculty to guide me for my chapbook and I would have chosen a different thesis topic. As busy as Dr. Albergotti

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