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Finding Mother in Busan

Mary Dengler
Dordt College, mary.dengler@dordt.edu

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Finding Mother in Busan

*Mary Dengler*

A bowl of flat black stones in water  
On a woven mat,  
A vase of weathered twigs  
At daily tea set out in tiny blue-veined cups,  
A bonsai arching left  
Beneath a branch of driftwood  
Dragged from ancient shores and hanging on our wall,  
And pots of Jade  
In sparsely furnished rooms  
Of shadowy slate and earthen greens  
Where penciled slender birds perched recklessly  
On arching trees beneath a globe of red  
Implied a heart and frame  
At odds with Carolina brick and New York wood.

When I was sick  
And childhood friends would come inside to play,  
Their eyes would trip from rocks to twigs;  
Their laughter hush in smoky wooded scents.  
When I was well,  
Their houses seemed oppressive, crowded, loud and thick  
With couches, doilies, smell of cooking meat.

I’d come alone to take my seat at tea  
Content to roam internal landscapes  
In my mother’s home  
Unconscious of their forming power.  
My inner palette added yellows, blues, and whites  
From mother’s poem  
“White sails billowing on a sun-washed sea.”

Now, from my window in Busan,  
I’ve found that hidden frame  
That shaped her vision, painting mine.  
The feet of mist-wrapped mountains  
Touch the bay,  
Where boats lie anchored motionless  
At night for fish and squid to dress  
The bowls of rice on tables of Busan.  
At dawn above the fleece-wrapped heads of ancient hills  
Like warrior sages keeping guard,  
A reddened globe emerges like the face of God
To guide high-rises  
In their endless march along the bay  
And move the traffic river-like along the bridge  
And play around the Buddha laughing  
Miles above my head.

But on the quiet Keong-Chu forest paths  
Where knowing hands constructed frames to help each tree  
Out-stretch its weathering twigs in wind-blown reach,  
The rain taps streams of flat black rocks  
Arranged  for contemplation and retreat.  
Scented woodland smoke and rocks and reaching limbs  
Have brought me home to Mother’s world for tea.