

i elite lyric poetry

Helen Cho

that
night
in
sea
so
many
wind

but
small
boat

only
ten
metre

we
are
forty-seven
.people

i
always
pray

please

let
me
come
to
land

if
no
land
i
.die

i
cannot
handle
because
just
so
small
boat

but
lucky

in
morning

we
see
land

and
that
land
is
indonesia.

i always

i don't know why

my life

i always too late

i see people with no money
i try to help them

and then

i don't know why

i always have trouble sometimes

i always like that

now i don't need nothing i just live like that

when
i'm
young

i
know
how
to
upset
.myself

my
life

when
i'm
kid

i
never
live
with
my
father
and
mother

i
just
live
with
my
.sister

every
month
my
father
give
some
money
to
my
sister
to
take
care
me

my
sister

only
eleven
my
sister

but
she
take
care
.me

we
are
four
brother
and
sister.

when		i	time	
i'm		try	another	
fourteen		go		
		few	i	
i'm		time	go	
fourteen			waiting	
in		one	for	
1975		time	boat	
and		some	few	
communist		people	day	
come		liar	already	
to		but		
.vietnam		that	then	
	that	time		
	time	i	i	he
		still		
	my	young	hear	have
brother	for	so		
buy	when	communist	my	accident
things	we	get		
and	find	me	brother	he
sell	right	but		
	person	they	died.	died
		let		
and	we	me		then
when	can	go.		
he	give			
make	that		i	
money	money		come	
my	for		back	
older	boat			
sister	so		i	
keep	i		don't	
that	can		want	
money	left		to	
for	my		go	
.him	country.		more.	

i						but	but
say						i'm	i'm
						lucky	lucky
no	i						
good	don't					when	because
to	have					i	
.live	money	i				left	i
	to	don't				my	don't
	buy	have				country	care
	soy	money	i				
	.sauce	to	don't			i	i'm
		buy	have			hurt	lucky
		soy	money	i			
		sauce	to	don't		i	because
		or	buy	have		hate	
	.bread	soy	money			my	i
		sauce	to	money		stepmother	
		put	to			because	live
		in		i		when	
		rice				i	i
		to		don't		left	
		eat		have		she	still
		with				don't	
		.tofu		because		give	live.
						me	
						one	
						cent	
						for	
						my	
						pocket	
						just	
						wear	
						one	
						cloth	
						and	
						.go	

		but	i	
			left	
		i'm	my	
		lucky	country	
when				
i		one	october	
come		friend	4	
from		give	.1982	
sea		me		
to		one	when	
refugee		address	i	
camp		for	come	
in		one	to	
indonesia		gentleman	canada	
first		he	it	i
month	i	work	march	hear
i	in	in	30	for
go	camp	manpower	.1986	first
interview	already	in		time
with	over	windsor		at
australia	three			this
canada	year	his		time
		wife		
everywhere	i	vietnamese		my
i		chinese		
apply	still	so		younger
		i		
but	waiting	just		sister
		write		
nobody	what	letter		died.
	country	to		
they	to	her.		
don't				
accept	take			
.me	me.			

i
just
sent
money
home
for
first
time
and
my
older
sister
sent
letter she
to don't
say have
money
she
so
killed she
herself kill
already herself.

what?

i'm sorry

you want to eat?

you want to say hello?

i'm sorry my bird want something

you want to say hello to my friend?

lot				
of				
pirate				
lot	they			
of	take			
pirate	your	when		everybody
		you		want
boat	boat	sit		to
		in		go
in	your	boat		safety
		in		but
.sea	money	sea	you	you
		you	have	cannot
	they	don't	no	choose
		know	choice	yourself
	take	where	where	
		you	you	because
	your	go	go.	sea
				and
	everything			wind
				make
	and			you
				go
	kill			where
				they
	.you			go
				so
				you
				go
				where
				they
				go.

my				my	
stepbrother				stepsister	
my					
stepsister				sometimes	
sit					
in				something	
one					
boat	that	my		in	
	boat	stepsister			
	bad			that	
that	lucky	she	she		
boat		hear	say	boat	
eighteen	wind	so	when		
men	make	many	she	she	but
four	that	yelling	wake	don't	
women	boat		up	want	usually
	go	she		to	
usually	to	see	she	tell	pirate
they	pirate	so	just	me	
go		many	know		do
forty	pirate	hand	she		
fifty	take	in	in		that
sixty	that	sea	land		
people	boat				if
in		she	she		
one	put	try			they
boat	eighteen	to	don't		
but	men	grab			don't
that	in	every	remember		
boat	sea	hand			they
only					
twenty-two			more		
people	keep	but			kill
	four	pirate	only		
expensive	women	hit	four		women
that	in	her	women		
.boat	.boat	head.	.alive		.too

people

when

they

left

their

country they

know

lot

of

people

die

but

you you

need don't

to know

accept where

it you

go.

i'm fine !
how are you ?

good ?
summer coming

sorry

there you go

you want chicken ?
you want pepperoni ?

you want extra cheese ?

okay my friend

how is pizza okay ?

thank you !

okay one pizza you want bag ?

okay eat here
you want drink ?

i need to put it little bit in oven okay ?

hello yes sir

one pepperoni yes sir

tell me story of all these things

beginning wherever you wish tell even us



Helen Cho *Tai Lam: memory of hunger finds its form* 2015 video still

As part of *Space Silence*, exhibited at SFU's Audain Gallery in Vancouver from January 16 to March 14, 2020, Helen Cho presented the first two chapters of a video trilogy sharing the life history of Tai Lam, a Vietnamese refugee who currently resides in downtown Toronto.

i elitere lyric poetry came out of the process of transcribing and extending Lam's powerful narration to the printed page, preserving his fractured spoken language as well as applying the principles of Korean grammar. The title of the piece as well as the final two lines borrow from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*, which is organized into nine parts after the nine Greek muses. In actuality there is no muse named Elitere; Cha invented her as a replacement for Euterpe, possibly "to critique the privileged place of epic as high literature."¹

Beginning in December of 2020, in lockdown in her studio in Toronto, Cho spent three months positioning Lam's narrative on the page, incorporating Cha's Elitere in(ter)vention, the traditional Korean style of vertical writing, as well as her spatial sensibility that draws on working with landscape. While the text might be viewed conceptually, the title's insistence on the lyrical points to the epic quality of Lam's narrative, his personal history, and its articulation.

¹Wong, Shelley Sun. "Unnaming the Same: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*." *Feminist Measures: Soundings in Poetry and Theory*, ed. Lynn Keller and Christanne Miller. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1994), 43–68.



Tanya Lukin Linklater ***Slay All Day*** 2016 video still Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery