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Three Poems: “My Mother is a Hungry Ghost,” “Lok-Yeay,” and “My Heart is a Chest of Drawers”

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Creative and Literary Works

Three Poems:

"My Mother is a Hungry Ghost," "Lok-Yeay," and "My Heart is a Chest of Drawers"

Bunkong Tuon

Union College

"My Mother is a Hungry Ghost"

How she hungers for my success,
for me to achieve the American Dream.
But this dream has become a nightmare,
where I am a ghost of a war
the American people wish to forget.
When they see my face they hear the muffled
cries of their sons, brothers, and lovers
locked in lonely garages and cold basements.
When I take their daughters to the movies,
they see the ravaged body of Dith Pran
and the pyramid of broken bones.
When I write, they want to read
the immigrant success story,
a child survivor winning
the National Spelling Bee.
They want to hear how
great America is,
not the ghosts they make of me
and my people.



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“Lok-Yeay”

Diced garlic turns gold in oil. Minced pork
Mixed with *prahouk*. I adore your cooking forever.

I have two children now: a boy and a girl, beautiful and
Smart. I wish you had met them before leaving forever.

Sometimes I find parts of me missing. This is how
I am without you. In the dark I’m floating forever.

Lok-Yeay, poem after poem I write for you.
I write to keep you in the land of the living forever.

As long as I, Bunkong, still breathe, my body still warm,
My life I dedicate to you, my loving forever.

"My Heart is a Chest of Drawers"

The top drawer is my kids.
Chanda lies on her stomach
watching *Spongebob Squarepants*.
Little brother's head rests on her
legs, fingers playing with her toes.

The middle drawer: Lok-Ta
teaches me how to pronounce the
Khmer alphabet while Lok-Yeay
on the kitchen floor crushing
ginger, garlic, and chili.
The scent of minced pork with
prahok and kafir leaves is home.

The bottom drawer: my wife,
whose wit is sharp as an Obsidian
knife, cuts me in half when I step
out of line, but her heart is open as
the ocean, giving as the earth itself.

About the Author



Dr. Bunkong Tuon is a Cambodian-American writer, poet, and critic. He is the author of *Gruel*, *And So I Was Blessed* (both published by NYQ Books), *The Doctor Will Fix It* (Shabda Press), and *Dead Tongue* (Yes Poetry). His prose and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in *New York Quarterly*, *Copper Nickel*, *The Lowell Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *carte blanche*, *Diode Poetry Journal*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Consequence*, among others. He is an Associate Professor of English at Union College, in Schenectady, NY.



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